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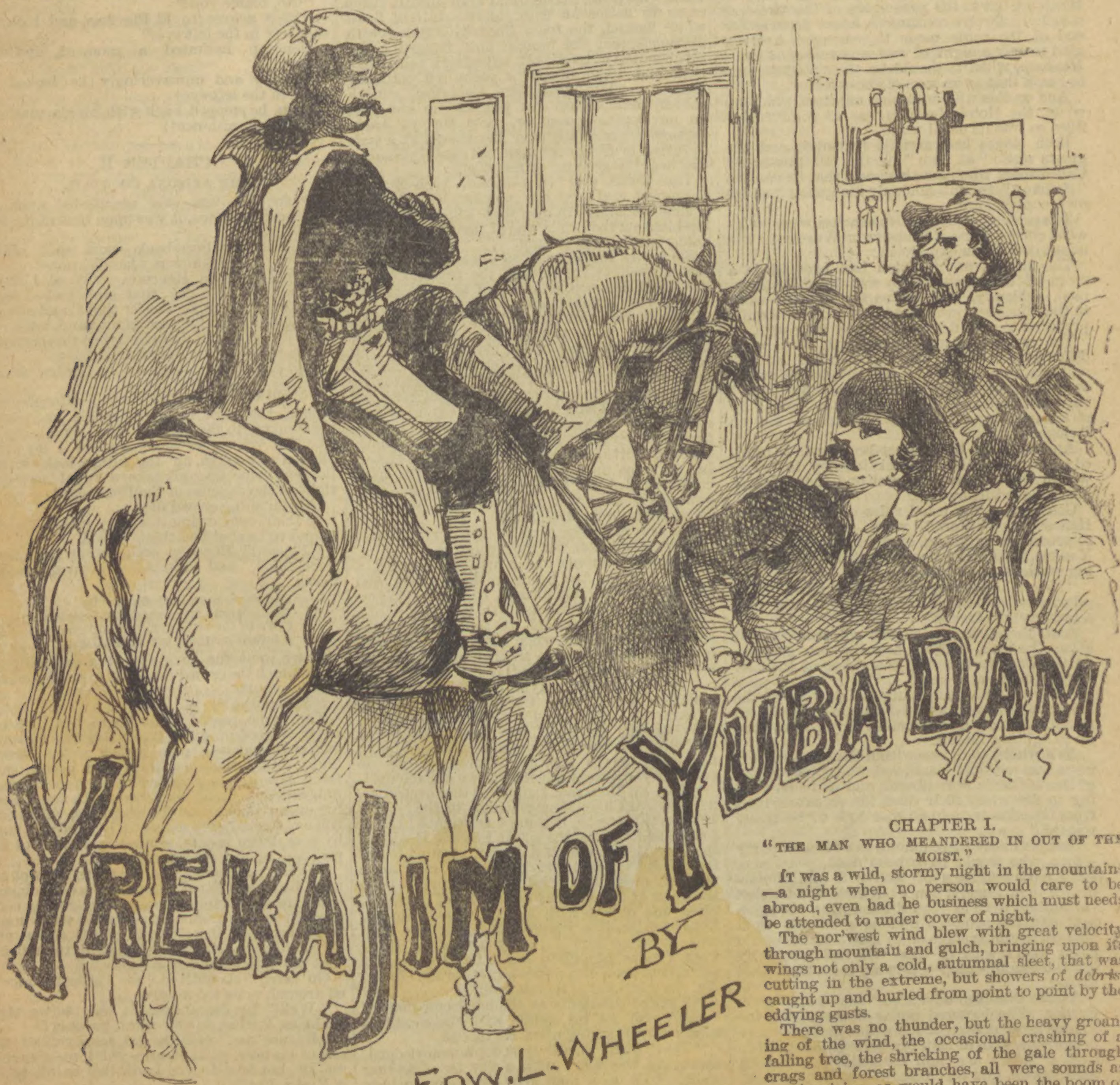
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BY
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CHAPTER I.

"THE MAN WHO MEANDERED IN OUT OF THE
MOIST."

It was a wild, stormy night in the mountains—a night when no person would care to be abroad, even had he business which must needs be attended to under cover of night.

The nor'west wind blew with great velocity through mountain and gulch, bringing upon its wings not only a cold, autumnal sleet, that was cutting in the extreme, but showers of debris, caught up and hurled from point to point by the eddying gusts.

There was no thunder, but the heavy groaning of the wind, the occasional crashing of a falling tree, the shrieking of the gale through crags and forest branches, all were sounds as awe-inspiring as would have been the boom of heaven's artillery.

Upon one side of a rugged mountain-side

THE SPORT CALMLY FOLDED HIS ARMS, AND FLASHED HIS GAZE SWEEPINGLY OVER THE
ARRAY OF MEN, WHO HAD FACED ABOUT TO RECEIVE HIM.

stage road, however, far—far above the level of the sea, a large, strongly-built log tavern withstood the blasts of the tempest, which eddied and roared around its several gables.

It was the only habitation, perhaps, for fifty miles around, and to a belated traveler would have undoubtedly presented a pleasing spectacle, for lights shone out from its windows upon the night, and the swing-sign over the door creaked invitingly.

This was Hencoop City, a midway stop for stages between the two ends of a tortuous mountain-trail.

Although as a metropolis Hencoop City could not boast of an extensive permanent population, two sunset stages daily—one from either direction—brought to the hotel enough people to comfortably fill it, and sometimes to overcrowd it.

One end of the route was a far Western railway connection; at the opposite end was the newly-developed mining-city called Death-Rattle.

Hence, an enterprising Californian, Hugenot Hencoop by name, had foreseen the necessity of an intermediate stopping-place for the daily coaches, and the "howtel" was up and ready for business in less time than an Englishman would be making up his mind about a Scotchman.

The result was most gratifying—not only to Hencoop, but to the passengers of the tiresome coaches. Twelve continuous hours from either end of the route made the voyagers heartily glad to seek a night of rest and repose at Hotel Hencoop, when it should be their good fortune to reach that grim wayside hostelry.

And on this wild autumnal night, of which we write, the Hotel Hencoop was as comfortably filled as was its usual wont.

Both stages had arrived by sunset, and the guests made "at hum" by the tall, raw-boned Californian, who made his boast that he run the "shebang" to suit not only his guests but his own convenience.

The passengers of the two coaches, were somewhat contrastive—if Webster or Worcester will admit of such an expression.

The stage from Glendon had brought in a score of travelers of the well-dressed class—men, evidently, "fresh," so far as hard work in the mines was concerned, but who were quite prepared to obtain a livelihood by their wits.

The arrivals from Death-Rattle were of a different sort—men who had handled the pick and pan, "rocked" the "cradle," and "blasted" everything they ran a loss that had any "stuff" in it—men who had made their little "pile," by strict industry, and were now off to see an "elephant."

And while the bleak, sleet-loaded winds howled about the gables of Hotel Hencoop, the scene within was convivial, genial and indicative of general good-fellowship.

Contrary to the usual rules of the far West, Hencoop's "bitters" were not warranted to produce *manipocha*, at sight; shrewd as any Yankee, the Californian did not believe in rushing matters, for, argued he—

"If one lightning-stroke will 'paralyze' a pilgrim, whar's the distiller going to ever own a brown-stone front?"

And, therefore, the silvery rill that gurgled across the trail, near the hostelry, was made to do its share in allaying the thirst of the hostelry's guests and made a "bar'l" of bug-juice go a good ways and thus the patrons of the Hencoop bar were obliged to consume several rounds of "nose-paint" before they got warmed up to fighting humor.

As a whole, the scene within the spacious bar-room was not unpleasant, for, while the "boys" of Death-Rattle were liberal, and perfectly willing to fire away their dust, the recent arrivals from Glendon were in no wise loth to be freely treated.

Sharps were there among the Glendon party—men who would have been dead, years ago, but for the readiness of their wits and nimbleness of their fingers; hence but little wonder that card-tables were in requisition during the evening, and the prospect became gradually plain that the morning stage on to Death-Rattle would carry with it some of those who had so recently left the mining-camp—carrying them back dead broke!

As the evening advanced, the scene grew livelier. The doctored liquor flowed faster, the tongue grew noisier, the bravado became more prominent, and, at last, one poor galoot tried to steal a paltry ace, and immediately died with his boots on, and was dragged out into the shed, where Huge Hencoop kindly stored all "stiffs," until an opportunity afforded to plant them.

It was but a few minutes after this trifling disturbance had occurred, that the ponderous door of the bar-room swung open, and a horseman rode unconcernedly into the hostelry.

Such an action, though of frequent occurrence in many parts of the West, was rather an unknown and surprising occurrence at Hencoop City, and, as a consequence, the startled guests all arose and noted the intruder with revolvers drawn, for the audacious horseman looked as if he might be "some on his muscle," "an ugly customer," "a mounted cyclone."

He was Apollo-like in build and development, with a handsome countenance; the mouth, shaded by a graceful brown mustache, was pleasant, but firm as adamant, and graced by two rows of pearly teeth; eyes dark, keenly penetrating and magnetic; hair of same color as mustache, and worn in luxuriant profusion over his shoulders.

His striking appearance was enhanced by the garb he wore—a costume that must have made him an object of attention anywhere.

Commencing at his feet, the top-boots were of the finest leather and make, and the top of the leggings were looped by silver links, to two bands of polished gold. Trimly-fitting pants of broadcloth, side-seamed with gold gilt, came next—the legs tucked gracefully into the boot-tops. At the waist, a belt—a chain-link band of gold, provided with pistol-holsters and knife-sheath. Then came to notice an embroidered shirt of finest white flannel, the front liberally studded with diamonds, and the human hair fringed collar thrown open at the throat, exposing a fair, white neck and upper breast; a plain, red corduroy jacket, a white, broad-rim sombrero, with a golden, diamond-set star pinning up one side; an enveloping gossamer, now thrown back, carelessly, gracefully over the shoulder; a pair of furred bridle-gloves upon the shapely hands—that was the costume of the rider.

The horse was trim-limbed, high-spirited, fiery-eyed, and deep bay in color; his back bore a richly-trimmed saddle, with gilt-embroidered lap-blanket; the bridle was of the Spanish style, gold-plated and glittering.

Such was the apparition that suddenly presented itself to the gaze of the revelers within the Hotel Hencoop, and caused them to rise en masse, with hostile mien.

"Don't be disturbed, chick-a-decs!" said the new-comer, in a tranquilly reassuring voice, as he drew rein, and shifted his elegant left limb to the right-hand side of the saddle. "Don't be the least bit discomfitted, for there is no cause for a single twitler. Seeing indications of comfort here, I said to E Pluribus Unum—that's my equine—'If you find the latch-string out, go for it,' hence we meandered in out of the moist. Has any individual got an objection?" and throwing the reins upon the animal's neck, the sport calmly folded his arms, and flashed his gaze sweepingly over the array of men, who had faced about to receive him.

But one man ventured to step forward, and that was the "boss" of the "shebang."

Hencoop was not what would be called a "bad" man on the borders. Long, lank and gawky, and slouchily attired, he seemed to possess more of a waggish spirit than the heart of a ruffian, yet old callers at the "City" were ready to affirm that when Hugenot "set down his fut"—and it was no smaller than a number twelve size—things had to "go."

"Waal, pardner, maybe I might chime in a plaintive echo!" the Californian remarked, stroking his long-pointed, tow-colored chin-piece. "S'pose ther guests of my palatial grub-mill don't like ter hev their patents infringed upon, ner their nerves shocked. Therefore, we do consider yer abrupt advent ruther audacious!"

"You do? Bless me; I supposed the rarefied atmosphere up here strengthening to the nerves. If it isn't, however, it is most fortunate I came, for, behold in me the great Electric Healer of the Age. Gifted with a power granted to but few of God's created, it is my faculty, pilgrim, to perform most wonderful cures coming within the scope of the various afflictions of mankind. Show me a man with a bent form, distorted limbs, or inactive nerves, and I will cure him, or— Now, see here; I'll tell you what I'll do: If I can't make him all O. K., in five minutes, I'll put up my head as a pistol-target for the crowd! An' it's that kind of a man I am!"

All stared amazedly at the handsome man of "gall," who sat his saddle with the conscious superiority of a king upon his throne.

"That's purty good!" Hencoop acknowledged, surveying the sport with a dry but doubting smile. "Et do a man good, they say, to hear another man shoot off his jaw. But, Doctor Devil-may-care-who-you-are, suppose you give

us your name, an' then a specimen o' yer skill. Now, we like check, an' lip, an' tongue—they aire Sunday breakfast dishes at this house—but we don't allow no braggarts around this 'burg'—an' this aire Hencoop City! Aire I right, boys?" and the Californian turned his angular face toward the crowd.

"Right you are!"

"And you are right!" assented the man on horseback. "I have not the least right to impose upon your good humor and good sense without giving you some show for your money. And now, with your ears in my embrace, I will proceed. You will at once observe that I am good-looking, a man of some brains, more nerve, and most gall. However, the subject of this discourse will be business, and so, in order to enlighten you as to the name, I will call your attention to the front-piece of my equine, and ask you—do you perceive any particular peculiarity about the phiz of my pard, E Pluribus? Look sharp, now, and be sure you're right, before you go ahead—any scar, blemish or defect, not belonging to one and a hundred others, of the horse race? It's a fair test—human or brute—and the gates are now open!"

All were mystified and therefore silent, until the Californian at length spoke:

"See here, what you givin' us?" he growled.

"My name, sir. Do you not see it?"

"No, blame you!"

"Step nearer to E Pluribus, and look him squarely in the left eye!"

Hencoop hesitated a moment, and then obeyed.

Steadily and unwaveringly he looked the horse in the left eye!

Then, he stepped back with an ejaculation of genuine astonishment!

CHAPTER II.

THE ARIZONA COCKTAIL.

If surprise was ever manifested upon one man's countenance, it was upon that of the lank Californian.

"Well!" the horseback sport said, sententiously. "D'ye know my handle, now?"

"Do I?" echoed Hencoop. "Waal I should pickle my pork! Say, that ain't bad—I say it ain't, and I mean it. Put 'er thar!" and advancing, he put forth his prodigious hand, which the sport grasped, and there and then was cemented an unuttered sign-token of friendship.

And the crowd looked on in further amazement.

"We'll water our stock!" the Californian said pulling the sport from the saddle, and marching him up to the bar. "When a real original cuss like you comes along, I allow I lay eride all idea o' margin, an' the future looks bright. Boyees, come up and take a royal 'nest-egg,' right at the expense of the Hencoop."

Of course the crowd did.

In their own estimation, they would have deserved to be shot had they refused.

"Boyees!" Hencoop said, when the glasses were filled, and elevated—"Boyees, heer's a toast:

'Ere's to a man both flip an' fly.

Whose name aire found in a hoss's eye;

Ere's to the stranger, rum an' gin,

A tarant'ier toast ter Yreka Jim!"

Down went the beverage, at a general g after which the crowd returned to staring at dashing sport.

"Yreka Jim!"

The name passed from lip to lip; then party stepped up and tapped Hugenot Hencoop on the shoulder—a man rather under average height, but broad-shouldered and portly, thick bow-legs, a regular full-moon sort of unbearded, and red, the blood in the veins, ing even redder; small peering eyes, whose color one could only ascertain by study; a by nose, large mouth, sensual and cruel expression, and—a plug hat!

The hat was one of the characteristics of the man, because it fitted him a trifle too much looked as if, but for the pair of protruding, it might take a notion to cover the whole but otherwise, the elegance of his attire, lavish display of jewelry, tended to indicate that the individual was a "natch."

On being "shouldered," the Californian ed around, none too mildly.

"Well?" he demanded, his tone softer than his looks, "what do you want, pardner?"

"Excuse me!" and the fat man rubbed the end of his nose, as if it annoyed him—"excuse me, sir, but how do you know this man's name is Yreka Jim?"

"How do I know?" ranted Hencoop. "Waal, sir, because I know!"

"You claim that by looking in the horse's eye you gained the knowledge?"

"You bet yer hat!"

A sniff of the nabob's right-hand nostril expressed his thorough disgust.

"That may 'go,' with many," he said, "but you don't fool me with any nonsense of that sort!"

"You don't believe it, eh?"

"No, I don't!"

"And, now, that you come to speak of it, has any one specially asked you to believe it?" Yreka Jim spoke up, eying the man, sharply. "Your doubts in the matter are all self-imposed, and if you don't choose to believe the evidences of your senses, what are you chinning in, for, anyhow?"

"Have a care, sir, how you address me!" the portly man cried, his red face reddening. "I'll have you understand that I am a gentleman."

"And, therefore, it would appear that you don't look upon me, as one of the same brand of humans?" Yreka said, interrogatively, his face wonderfully calm, but eyes gleaming.

"In the East, where gentlemen are known by their actions, I dare say you might easier obtain the distinction of being a fakir, than a gentleman," was the reply, which caused the crowd to look its surprise.

Yreka smiled.

"And so you are from the East, eh?" he demanded.

"I am from the East, sir!"

"A gentleman from the East?"

"Exactly!"

"And what might your name be?"

"If it concerns you to know, sir, I am Girard Gambetta, of Chicago."

"Ah! and because you have the distinction of belonging to the Western metropolis, you presume to come out here with a canful of bombast, and allow that I am not a gentleman, eh?" the sport cried, his tones growing sterner.

"I did not say that!" Gambetta declared, appearing a trifle uneasy. "Your sudden advent into our presence, coupled with your unintelligible gab created in my mind the suspicion, sir, that you were a fraud, if indeed not worse, and I wished to warn the good people, here, against trusting you, too far. If I made an erroneous inventory of you, I beg pardon, sir, a thousand times, as any true gentleman would!"

"If you made an erroneous inventory of me?" Yreka Jim retorted. "Then, I may infer that you are not entirely satisfied but what your inventory was correct."

"Oh! well, we won't have any more words about it—let the matter drop," the nabob said, evasively.

"Oh! no! not so easy as that, my boy!" Yreka returned. "I don't believe in that sort o' thing, you know. Put your corporosity up to that bar!" and click! click! went the revolver in the sport's grasp.

"Oh! yes! yes!—certainly I'll drink with you!" Gambetta hastened to say, marching up to the counter.

"Oh! you bet you will!" Yreka Jim rejoined;—"leastwise, there'll be a dead 'gentleman' and this floor if you refuse. Barkeeper, one please!"

Though the crowd stared at this order—an direct, on most occasions—they made no comment.

The barkeeper set out an empty glass.

"Now, put in it a teaspoonful of salt!" Yreka said, keeping an eye on his man. "Mr. Gambetta must have an Arizona cocktail. He said that I was really an electric healer, and show him what an efficacious tonic I can be."

"Add a little water, now, Gumboil;—that's a plenty. Now, then, add a teardrop of castor oil, and if you've got any put that in. Ah! you have, eh? You're most elegantly-appointed bar I've ended in a dog's age. Now, then, I suppose you'll be able to hunt up a couple of anti-eggs—not withered ones, but real ripe ones, in the present light of their usefulness."

"I've 'em, you bet!" the Adonis of the declared, with an understanding grin.

Girard Gambetta began to look decidedly uncomfortable.

"See here!" he began.

"Silence!" Yreka ordered, thrusting the muzzle of his elegant "six," against Gambetta's cheek. "When you are called upon to orate I'll let you speak. My finger is pressing hard upon the trigger, and the least movement of your jaw may cause the gentle gun to go off!"

The nabob was by this time trembling violently, for he knew but too well that his forwardness had placed him in a humiliating situation.

The barkeeper was equal to the emergency, for, diving down behind his counter he brought to light a couple of eggs, that, from their appearance, were of no recent production, and when he broke their yellowish contents into the glass with the other mixture, the perfume that arose caused the crowd to back off, and hold their noses in disgust.

"There, Girard Gambetta, the cocktail is ready," Yreka Jim announced. "Take it, and drink it without a murmur, or I'll blow your brains out."

"My God, man, I can't!" the nabob gasped, in horror. "That filthy mess! I drink that? No! never! I'll die first!"

"Suit yourself!" was the reply. "Choose whichever you think is the easiest—either you drink the cocktail, or you die in your tracks. This is my only code, where an Eastern gentleman insults a Western civilian. I will count five. One!"

White, and sick with horror, Gambetta turned an appealing look to Huguenot Hencoop.

"Yer needn't ax me!" the Californian declared grimly. "Ye run yer nose into a hornets' nest, and hev only ter abide by the sting-in'. Ef ye don't 'down' the dose, I'll not interfere if ye git carved up inter mutton-chops!"

And the general eagerness manifested by the crowd showed that his verdict suited them.

"Two!" cried Yreka Jim.

With the cold muzzle of the revolver now pressing against his forehead, the Gentleman from Chicago realized that his only choice was the disgusting dose or death.

"Three!" Yreka cried decisively. "You die, at five!"

With a gagging gasp Gambetta reached forward, and his quivering fingers laid hold of the glass. Then the thought of swallowing that awful dose caused him to shudder violently.

"Four!"

There was vicious emphasis now in Yreka's tones: his eyes showed that he had not the slightest idea of relenting.

With another spasmodic shudder, that appeared to rack his very frame, Gambetta tottering raised his arm, and opening wide the capacious orifice that served him as a mouth, he emptied the sickening mixture into it, and gulped it down.

With eagerness born of curiosity the spectators had watched for this *denouement*; but, the sympathetic reaction that followed was startling, in the extreme.

With hands clasped convulsively over their stomachs, and expressions unutterable upon their faces, they made, one after another, for the street—something like a flock of sheep breaking over a country fence.

Gambetta, short and fat as he was, must have been at least third in the race, and when the room was emptied of all but the sport, the Californian and a few other "strong stomached" individuals, the wild night without resounded with one awful intermingled cry of "aigs-ugh!" "aigs-ugh!" "aigs-ugh!"

"Yreka Jim, you're a brick!" the Californian exclaimed, as he and Yreka stood leaning against the bar. "Et ain't often I do take a 'put' or a 'call,' but when I do, I furst 'calls' my man, and then 'puts' out my hand. Shake! An', now, d'ye know this Gambetta?"

"Never saw him before in my life!"

"Tho't mebbe you might know him. What d'ye think of him?"

"Not much. He is not only an overbearing man, because he may have or may have had, some wealth; but he is deep."

The relieved men began to re-enter, then, one by one.

"About this horse's eye?" Hencoop remarked, interrogatively. "An explanation may save you some trouble from the crowd, who are not now the most even tempered."

"Of that, sufficient anon," Yreka answered, briefly. "Little danger of trouble, to-night, I guess. And if you will give me permission, I'd like to illustrate some of my electric healing qualities. I will guarantee not only to perform some astonishing cures, if there are any to be performed, but will put a penny in your pocket. Every man I cure of any ailment I'll make treat!"

"All right!" the Californian assented, enthusiastically, for albeit he had an eye to business, he had also formed an unusual admiration for the sport. "It's a bargain, Dunno, tho', as you'll find any one to doctor, among this gang."

"Without canvassing, you cannot understand the wants of a crowd like this," Yreka smiled.

The "sick" men were soon re-congregated within the room—a white-faced, woebegone lot.

Gambetta, however, looked as if, literally, he

had coughed up an earthquake, not to mention a volcano. He was deathly pale, wild-eyed, haggard, and trembling; but he was not less useful. Indeed, the proverbial lamb could not have been meeker.

"Gents, the best antidote on this occasion for pizen, is pizen itself," Yreka said good-humoredly, as he tossed a twenty-dollar gold-piece out upon the bar. "Anyhow, you're all welcome to put a nail in your coffin if you think it will be of any good to the country."

That the country should suffer through their backwardness the guests did not intend, and all fronted and faced with clock-like regularity. When the "shock" was administered, Yreka Jim was seen mounted upon a card-table, hat off and hair brushed back.

"Gents," he called out, "now that but one man has been satisfied, will you all be convinced? If so, step up and gaze into the left eye of my horse, steadily!"

They did.

One by one, single file, they passed in front of the horse and did as Jim had directed, until the last man had looked, when the sport demanded:

"Well, what name did you see blazing in E Pluribus Unum's eye?"

"Yreka Jim!" came the reply, unanimously.

"Right you are," the sport declared, smilingly. "And now, gentlemen, that you are satisfied as to my name, I want to show you what I can do. Remember, if my questions fit none of your cases, do not say so, but remain silent. It saves working the muscles of the jaw, which may be valuable to you some day. Now, is there any man in this crowd who has rheumatism?"

No answer.

"Or heavy action of the heart?"

No answer.

"Is there any man who has bent limbs, contorted joints, flesh swellings, lumbago, toothache or—"

"See hyar, friend; I think I've got a case for you," Huguenot Hencoop cried out.

And he pointed to a person who, at this moment, entered the bar-room—a specimen of humanity who could only be seen to be pitted.

Whereby hangs the remainder of our tale.

CHAPTER III.

THE DETECTIVE.

OF the town—no, we should say city, for it considered itself by large odds the biggest and foremost of its kind, in that particular region—Death-Rattle was just a characteristic, lively and go-ahead gathering of huts and humans.

It was young, thriving, and "blooded."

Of the "blood," there was the usual amount flowing, peculiar to every "tough" town.

Some few nights previous to the eventful one which opened our romance—a night when stars twinkled all over the heaven's azure dome, and the young moon threw down an effulgence of pure mellow light upon the camp, a certain residence within its by no means extended borders, and more pretentious than its neighbors, was brilliant in its front illumination.

This particular house was but a one-story-and-attic; therefore the light must have hailed from the parlor windows, which were guilty of being curtained by finest lace.

Within, a scene of elegance was presented to the man who looked in, from the outside—providing, of course, such a man did look in.

It was not a scene of Eastern opulence, but a scene of far, far Western elegance, the definition of which, is, comfort.

The front apartment was the parlor of the establishment, and showed not only the taste of a woman's hand in arrangement, but the test upon a man's pocket-book, in the furnishing.

Furniture, carpets, pictures, curtains, piano, vases—many and many modern things added, showed that either an indulgent parent, or mayhap husband, had thought well, and not parsimoniously, in selecting what might please the one who dwelt within.

And, upon this night of which we write, lights set off the quiet beauties of the apartment, brilliantly, and reflected upon two persons seated at opposite sides of the room.

Mentionable first, the lady—for her companion was of the opposite sex.

She was richly attired, silk, and lace charmingly intermingled in her costume; jewelry too, such jewelry as would make the bells of New York and London, open their eyes in wonder and envy.

As for herself, she was not a pronounced beauty, such as the enraptured novelist loves to picture.

She was aged between eighteen and nineteen years, and possessed a rare, almost perfect form.

In face she was just ordinarily pretty—not as pretty goes in our "best" Eastern society, but with a sweetly expressive face, plainly, not even artistically chiseled, yet indicative of great strength of character as well as of true womanhood.

The man opposite her was plainly attired—not as that word goes in the far West, but as the East uses it. His garments were in no wise those of wealth, yet were respectably neat and substantial.

Well formed, with a well-shaped head, upon which was a stylish hat, dark, lustrous eyes, such as a woman could like—a graceful mustache, like his hair, of a brown color—all in all, a nice-looking fellow, and, if one might judge, not a bad match for the young woman.

"Mr. Senal, I am so glad you have come," the lady was saying, betraying but the slightest, most delightful Spanish accent. "I am so glad you have come. Ever since you saved my life in the mountains, when my frightened horse threatened to plunge me over the precipice, I have waited to see you once more. Oh! sir, I am so glad to meet you. You were so brave—so handsome—so—but, sir, I told papa of your heroic conduct, and he is more grateful than I ever knew him to be before. I—I—"

"Miss Romeriqua," interposed the man, "you are too flattering, for I have done nothing deserving such praise. I chanced to stop your horse—pah! for that! A hundred men would have done the same, if an opportunity had presented. You entreated me to visit you, and I have come; but, do you remember, you promised that my call this evening should be unknown to your father?"

"Nor is it known. You and I are alone tonight, Don Senal, and I am glad of it."

"Why glad?" and the visitor regarded her thoughtfully, if not searchingly.

"Glad!"

And a light—a light of love's purest worship—entered the señorita's dusky, passionate eyes.

"Glad, Don Senal? And why should I not be glad? Oh! did you not bring me gladness—not simply by your bravery—oh! no. Your smile, your very touch—it was gladness then, for I realized that you were—"

She arose falteringly, and faced him, her head slightly bowed, her eyes downcast, her whole form tremulous with emotion.

No man, anchorite or woman-hater, could have resisted the influence of such worship.

Senal arose, and she sprung into his embrace, so irresistibly that it was only with a strong effort he could put her off at arm's length.

"Why are you thus agitated, Miss Romeriqua?" he asked. "I am sure—"

"Don't!" she replied—"I must tell you. I am a Spanish woman, and not afraid to speak. I love you!"

"Love me?" Senal ejaculated, surprised, while at the same time, he had not been unprepared for the avowal.

"Yes, love you," she reiterated, passionately—"love you as a woman can love but once. Ever since our eyes first met I have realized that you were my heart's idol, and to possess your love in return would be the culmination of my fondest desire."

Senal listened, scarcely daring to look into her burning orbs.

"This is certainly a great surprise to me, señorita," he said; "such a surprise as I little anticipated, or, in all probability, I should not have accepted your invitation to call."

"You wouldn't?—and why not? Is there any dishonor in the confession I made to you? No! Then, why should you not have come? I love you—I, Inez Romeriqua, and am not ashamed to own it! I am Miguel Romeriqua's daughter; I don't know what it is to want for anything. Shall I want for your affection, when I can win it? I am rich, you are poor, and I can forever place you above the possibility of want. Would I not then be entitled to a return of your affection?"

"Perhaps, señorita, were I inclined to become the party to a love affair," Senal replied, "but I am not. I can but feel grateful to you for your good opinion of me, but there I must draw a line. You will forget your foolish admiration of me when I am gone!"

"Never! You shall not go!" Inez cried, passionately. "You are mine, and you shall belong to no one else. Who is this other woman who dares to have a claim upon you? I'll strangle her!"

Suddenly fired with jealousy, she stood there, erect, with flushed face and blazing eyes, a picture of incarnate indignation.

"You are alarmed without cause, señorita," Senal replied. "Be seated, I beg of you, and

calm yourself. Were I inclined to wed any one, it could not be you, despite the fact that I am now heart and fancy free."

"Why not?" she demanded, fiercely.

"Oh! for several reasons!"

"Name them—I will know them! Speak, sir—speak!"

"Well, one reason is that I do not care to marry—should not, I fancy, even were I to fall in love, for a man's freedom is a treasure immeasurably superior to anything he could possess. Another reason is, I could never marry a person who lives a lie!"

He was sitting in the velvety arm-chair, across the room, as he said this, and looking directly at Miss Romeriqua.

She started violently, and turned white as she heard the words, but conquered her agitation, by a mighty effort, and returned his gaze calmly.

"I do not understand why you should speak so strangely, Don Senal. You owe me an explanation."

"Certainly, if, indeed, you really need one—if it will any further enlighten you. You told me, on our first meeting, that you were of Spanish-Mexican descent, and that your father, Miguel Romeriqua, owned millions' worth of property in and about the city of Mexico."

"I did tell you so, sir. Do you not believe it?"

"Well, hardly," and Senal smiled, showing his pearly teeth, "when I know that it is utterly false—your statement."

"Sir! This to me?"

"Ay! that to you! Don't let it startle or alarm you, however, until you are satisfied that I am untrustworthy."

Miss Romeriqua was whiter than before, and her gaze wandered toward the bell-pull.

"Oh! you need not trouble yourself to ring for your father," Senal went on, his voice slightly sarcastic. "It's not worth while, for, were he to come, he would not alarm me. You see, señorita, I know much more than you think I know—much more than you could wish I knew. Your name is, ostensibly, Romeriqua—a good name, too, showing an artistic choice in the choosing. The plain name of Banks is by no means as pretty, or romantic!"

Inez uttered a strange cry, and put up her lily hands, imploringly.

"Don't!" she gasped. "How did you find—"

"I will tell you all," Senal interrupted, "and, then, you will know why our respective paths in life must be wide apart. I am a detective. My name is not Seguin Senal—but, then, that's nothing. Detectives are allowed a multitude of names."

"At the time it was my fortune to save your life, I had undertaken a detective job, and was looking for a man named Bayard Banks, of Chicago, who was wanted for the several charges of forgery, embezzlement and fraud. How the case fell into my hands, it cannot matter for you to know; but, fall into my hands it did, and I was in search of Banks, with small prospect of finding him, when you and I first met. Little did I expect then, that our chance meeting could have anything to do with my work—but it did. You no doubt wonder how, and I will try to inform you; you remember, that, lacking one of your own cards, you wrote your name on the back of a business card and gave it to me. When I left you, I examined the card, and I found upon the other side of it, the address, or rather the business advertisement of Breman, Banks & Co., Chicago, with the 'Banks' crossed over with red ink. I at once knew that I had struck a clew, and was not long in developing the fact that Miguel Romeriqua, the self-styled Spanish-Mexican mine-owner of Death-Rattle, was Bayard Banks, forger and defaulter, of Chicago. Consequently, it but remains that you, his daughter, instead of being Señorita Inez Romeriqua, are Beulah Banks."

The look of unutterable horror and helplessness, that had gradually settled upon the face of the girl, now resolved into an expression of defiance.

"Well, what do you propose to do?" she demanded, fiercely.

"Oh! I have not made up my mind, as regards that. I shall have time to deliberate."

"Yes, you will need time to deliberate," Inez said, with peculiar emphasis.

"By which you mean a threat, I presume," Senal remarked, without appearing to be much perturbed.

"It don't matter. I shall never see my father harmed—not I!"

"Oh! I suppose it would be but natural for you to cling to him. You need not fear that I shall trouble him, at present, providing he

does not escape from this town, for I have other business to attend to. If he attempts to escape, I shall be compelled to put the nippers on him, maybe!"

He arose then, and stood silently gazing at her, as if awaiting her verdict.

She bowed her gaze, when it met his, and seemed deep, in meditation.

At length, she arose, and looked at him.

"Mr. Senal," she said, "I, a weak woman, and perhaps a sinful one, since you are aware that I try to shield my father, have confessed my love for you—I can still honestly and honorably do the same. You are at liberty to go, sir, but, if you knew of the intensity with which I love you, you would never seek to stab the heart I have, unwomanlike, laid at your feet—through my father!"

Senal was deeply moved.

He saw how earnest she was—how truthful, even under the enforced ban of falsehood, and knew that it would be a cruelty among cruel things to wound that heart—that soul heart, not afraid to speak its message.

"Yes, duty demands that I go, Miss Romeriqua," he said, after a moment. "I would I had never met you—for then I could have gone on and done my duty to the law, of which I am at present a servant. And now, before we part, let me tell you something: I am not a harsh man, nor a cruel man, but I am a just man. You say you love me. Will you not truthfully answer me one question?"

"Go on," Inez said, covering her face with her hands. "I anticipate what you are going to ask?"

"Perhaps; but, dear lady, I hope you are not in the least to blame," Senal said, kindly, compassionately. "There is a passage in the Bible, intimating that the sins of the parent are visited on the offspring; but we will hope that it does not apply to your case. And now, a question: Your father came to this section of the country for an object—that is, he did not flee from civilization to this remote part simply for the surety of safety from the grasp of the law. He had an object?"

"Yes—yes!" Inez assented, falteringly. "I will not lie to you, Mr. Senal; he had an object, and I, being a party knowing to it, am guilty, and despicable to you. Oh, God! why did I not die ere I had to suffer this?"

"Be calm," Senal said, as stoically calm himself as a man well could be. "Self-condemnation is not, in my estimation, a virtue. Wait till you are condemned, then acknowledge what is the truth. But I am moralizing. Your father came here for an object, more than to escape the law, which he may have thought he had cleverly evaded. In leaving Chicago—or before that time, rather—he embezzled a sum of money belonging to a Western orphan child. This child also had a life insurance placed upon her life to an extraordinary figure; and in case she should die her guardian is the beneficiary. "But"—glancing at his watch—"I am encroaching upon my own time. I will talk more anon. Now, mind! If Miguel Romeriqua desires to dwell placidly in Death-Rattle, warn him to have no schemes against the orphan!"

Then Senal was gone!

CHAPTER IV.

HI HATCH'S LEFT BOOT.

To return to the Hotel Hencoop.

All eyes followed the direction, indicated by the Californian's finger, and saw an old man entering the saloon, who indeed looked as if he were in need of some powerful remedy for ills that he was heir to.

His legs were distorted, and stiffened in the joints, and his left arm was drawn half-behind his back.

He hobbled along, with the aid of a cane, rather than walked, and his face indicated that every exertion was positive torture.

His attire was coarse, ragged and greasy, his hat being shot full of holes.

In face he was not a bad-looking man, had his beard been trimmed, and an application of soap and water brought into play. His hair, beard and eyes were dark brown in color, the latter peering out from in under a shaggy overhanging pair of eyebrows. His features however were gaunt and haggard; that he had seen hard times was apparent.

It was such a man as this that Yreka Jim had been looking for, and leaping from the table he stepped forward, as the stranger hobbled up to the bar.

"Beg pardon, old gent, but may I ask you if you are afflicted with rheumatism?" Yreka asked, courteously. "If so, I may be of some assistance to you in a professional capacity."

"You!" the cripple ejaculated, surveying the sport, from head to foot. "Waal, neow, stranger, yer don't presume to allow thet yer able to straighten out stiffened j'int, o' years standin'?"

"Perhaps I may be able to do it. Have you been thus crippled for any considerable length of time?"

"Yas, I hev, an' tried everything in ther doctor book, but nary a bit o' use. I got wuss, instead o' better, an' so, finally guv it up, as a bad job. A feller told me ter keep meself soaked in bug-juice, an' it would limber my joints, an' I dunno but it works 'bout as well as ary other remedy."

"It can hardly have the desired effect," Yreka advised, "and is a remedy worse than the disease. But, don't go any further in that direction for I have the presumption to say that I can take the kinks out of you, and you'll be as lively and frisky as a young colt!"

"Git eout! 'Tain't possible, stranger—'tain't possible, nohow!"

"On the contrary, it is possible, and for a small sum, I'll make literally a new man out of you!"

"How much 'll ye charge?"

"Oh! it ought to be worth about twenty dollars, I reckon."

"Twenty dollars? Jerusalem! Why, d'ye know I hain't felt o' that much cash in six months, stranger! Guess these shanks will hev to go the way they are—they will, for all my payin' twenty dollars!"

"Look here, my man, will you be kind enough to tell me your name?"

It was Girard Gambetta, who spoke, and he addressed the cripple.

"My name? Why it's Jim Jones, John Smith, or anything to suit," was the reply.

"Nonsense. Tell me your true name, and I'll pay for your treatment, if this man can do you any good."

This offer seemed to strike the cripple favorably, for, regarding the Chicagoan sharply, for a moment, he said:

"Waal, my name is Hiram Hatch, tho' I don't know why you should desire to know."

"Oh! merely out of curiosity—merely out of curiosity," Gambetta hastened to say. "And now, sir—turning to Yreka Jim, "go ahead, and let's see some of your wonderful curative power. I'll bet you a hundred dollars you cannot help this man."

"That's a go!" Yreka promptly accepted, taking a roll of bills from his pocket, and selecting two fifties from it, and placing them in the Californian's hands. "Put up yer dust, my friend, and I'll have the pleasure of owning it, almost before you are aware of the fact."

Gambetta put up his hundred, although not without some hesitation.

Then, Yreka Jim turned to Hiram Hatch.

"I will first look at your left hand, which I see is somewhat twisted out of shape."

He took the cripple's left hand in his own, and an instant later Hatch uttered a cry of pain and surprise, and attempted to break away.

"Stand still!" Jim ordered. "The current passing from my hands to yours, is what you need," and he held the crippled hand fast in his own for fully five minutes—during which Hatch twisted and twitched and moaned from very pain. At length Yreka spoke:

"There, my afflicted friend, the joints of your hand, and arm, are limber, now, and I think you can use your left, equally as well as you can your right."

"By Jimminy, ye'r right!" Hatch replied, swinging his arm freely, and opening and shutting his hand. "You've limbered that fluke, fer sartain! An' now, ef you kin fix my under-pinnin' in a like manner, I'll feel like jumpin' 'lar over the moon."

"Very well! Sit down on a chair, and take off our boots. It won't take long to fix you out."

The cripple obeyed. Then Yreka Jim slowly and silently straightened out the toes, to their natural position, and rubbed the feet and ankles, until Hatch gave a yell of pain, as the magnetic current passed through his limbs.

"Now, then, stand up, and give us a jig," Yreka finally commanded, and in another minute, Hatch was skipping about the bar-room floor, as nimbly as a school-boy let loose for a vacation.

"Whoop! hooray!" he yelled. "I'm another man, altogether, an' kin kicked the spectacles off the moon. Sum feller who's lot's o' lucre, jest treat ther hull crowd, at my expense, an' I'll settle wi' him when I strike it rich!"

And the way the man cavorted around was certainly proof that Yreka Jim's wonder-working had been no simple brag, but a certainty.

"The money belongs to Yreka Jim!" Hugenot Hencoop cried. "He hes did as he allowed he could do, an' won the bet fair. Here's yer rocks, Yreka."

Yreka, smiling, accepted the wager-money, and put it in his pocket, much to the chagrin of Girard Gambetta, who, although he made no protest, looked his dissatisfaction.

He retired to a seat, in a far corner of the saloon, accompanied by a young man who resembled him, although much thinner of face and figure.

He was not yet out of his teens, if one might judge by his looks, and his resemblance to the gentleman from Chicago was sufficient to warrant the impression that the two were father and son.

When they were seated, the elder man lit a cigar, and tossed one over to his son.

"You noticed how I questioned that fellow about his name—the one who calls himself Hatch?" he said, in a low tone; "you noticed that, Morrell?"

"I did," the younger man said, "and wondered why your curiosity."

"Curiosity! Gods, boy, that man is the stepping-stone to our success."

"I do not understand, sir. Are you known to one another?"

"No—that is, I don't think he recognizes me. But I know him. He is the man who paid a hasty visit to Chicago, to see Bayard Banks, in the interest of Ruth Reynard, the orphan. When this man, Hatch, as he calls himself, disappeared, Ruth Reynard also disappeared, and is still missing, although there cannot be a doubt but what she is out here, near the place of our destination."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, everything points that way. Her father died out here, and it was the general belief that he owned a secret mine, in or about Death-Rattle, apart from the fortune he entrusted to the keeping of Bayard Banks, for Ruth. At any rate, Banks had this idea, and after Ruth's disappearance, and his wholesale forgery and embezzlement in Chicago, he came here, no doubt, hoping to not only find the girl, but possibly Reynard's secret mine."

"You are satisfied, then, that Banks and his daughter are to be found in Death-Rattle?"

"Oh, yes! I should not have come were I not positive. If I mistake not, he has a well-lined pocketbook, and will be willing to make almost any terms with me."

"What about this man Hatch?"

"That remains to be seen. I presume he is going to Death-Rattle in the morning. If so, all well and good. If not, you are to go on alone, and I will follow Hatch to his destination."

"What do you think of this fellow, Yreka Jim, then?"

"Curse him!" and Gambetta's teeth went together viciously. "I hate him. I'd shoot him without a bit of compunction, but it wouldn't do. He's a reckless devil, and has won his way into the graces of the gang present, through his cheekiness. I presume it will be the safest and wisest to have nothing to do with him whatever."

"How do you account for the light, and name, in the horse's eye?"

"The eye is glass, and the name blown in it. The light—probably phosphorus—within the ball, illuminates the name. It's a clever thing, at any rate. The fellow is more than he lets on. I fancy—a detective, no doubt."

"After us?"

"Bah! no. We are safe, so far as the present is concerned. When I find Banks, I'll make ourselves safe, in earnest."

In this strain the two men conversed for some time, until Morrell at length announced his intention of seeking his bed for the night, and left the saloon.

In the mean time, order had been thoroughly restored, and Yreka Jim was playing poker, in company with Hencoop, and three others.

Hiram Hatch had recovered from the first paroxysm of delight, at the magic cure Yreka Jim had performed, and had tipped back, in a chair, and was fast asleep.

After Morrell retired, Girard Gambetta arose, and sauntered leisurely about the room, pausing now, to overlook a game, or mayhap procuring a "smile" at the bar.

Finally, to his satisfaction, he saw Hatch arise, and enter the waiting-room for ladies, which immediately adjoined the saloon, and was also the way to the sleeping apartments.

Without a word the Chicagoan followed him. None save Yreka Jim, had particularly noticed their departure from the bar-room; he,

however, had seen the Chicagoan's look of expectancy as he left, and the thought flashed across his mind:

"He means to interview the fellow, Hatch, privately—I wonder what about? I don't half like that Chicago gentleman. His face is a rogues' gallery in itself."

His attention being called to the game they were playing, he thought no more of the matter, until the sound of a pistol-report, and a heavy fall, reached his hearing, coming from the next room.

Springing from the table, he and Hencoop were first to reach the adjoining room, where they found Hiram Hatch lying outstretched upon the floor, weltering in his life's blood.

A bullet wound in his left breast showed where he had been shot.

"There's murder been done here!" Yreka Jim cried. "This man has been shot!"

"Reckon as how he shot himself!" suggested Hencoop, pointing to Hatch's right hand, which clutched a revolver. "Yes—see—one charge is gone, an' the tool's warm. He's committed suicide!"

"I don't believe it!" Yreka declared, stoutly. "The man was too tickled at being cured to do anything like that. He was followed in here by that Chicago chap, Girard Gambetta, only a few minutes ago, for I saw them leave the bar-room. Find this Gambetta and don't let him escape, you men! Give me a hand, some one. We'll see if we can't revive this poor fellow!"

Hatch was lifted to a position on a settee and bolstered up.

Restoratives were then applied by Yreka Jim, who also examined the wound and saw that the man was hard hit and would likely die.

By thorough work Yreka finally brought him back to consciousness for a minute, and he partially opened his eyes.

"Speak! did Girard Gambetta shoot you?" Yreka Jim cried, eagerly—"quick! before it is too late!"

Hatch nodded in the affirmative, then drew a sealed envelope from his pocket and handed it to Yreka.

"Take it!" he faintly articulated. "Read it yourself—it is for no one else!"

"Why did Gambetta shoot you?" Yreka demanded, pocketing the envelope.

"He—he didn't shoot—I—"

Here a mass of blood spurted from the man's mouth and he sunk back, his eyes rolling in his head.

An instant more and his spirit had flown to its Giver.

He was dead, and the particulars of the tragedy were left clouded in mystery.

He had nodded affirmatively when Yreka had asked if Gambetta shot him; but, in another instant he had faintly denied it, if his words were correctly understood.

"He—he didn't shoot—I—"

What would he have said had death not shut off his speech?

Would he have admitted of having shot himself?

This was the all-important question, and the spectators, who had crowded into the room, exchanged glances and looked at Yreka Jim, as if expecting him to speak.

"Hatch is dead!" the sport said, gravely, "and the question is, gentlemen—did he kill himself, or is Girard Gambetta the author of the crime? He nodded affirmatively when I asked him if Gambetta shot him, but the words uttered afterward appeared intended to clear the Chicagoan of such a crime. Where is the man?—has he been found yet?"

"Yes," Hencoop said, "here comes two fellows with him now."

At this juncture Gambetta was led into the room minus his shoes, and coat and vest.

"We found him in bed," said one of the captors.

"What does this mean?" Gambetta demanded, angrily. "Why am I thus hauled out of bed, I want to know?"

"You followed Hiram Hatch into this room, sir, and only a few minutes later, a pistol-shot was heard and Hatch was found to be mortally wounded!" Yreka said, eying the gentleman from Chicago, sternly. "Perhaps you can throw some light on the matter, sir!"

"I know nothing about the affair!" Gambetta declared, haughtily. "On entering this room, I passed directly on to the sleeping apartments. Hatch was standing over yonder, looking in the glass."

"Did you not hear the pistol report?"

"No."

"I asked Hatch if you shot him, sir, and he nodded affirmatively."

"He lied, infamously. I did not know the man, nor had I any thought or cause to murder him."

Yreka Jim turned to the crowd:

"Gents, it's a grave affair, at best. What do you think about it? Is the suspicion strong enough against this Gambetta to hold him, or not? All in favor of letting him off, on the strength of the doubt, please make known the fact by uplifting the right hand."

All hands but four were raised.

"The majority rules," Yreka decided, "and you are free, sir. But if I were to express my candid views, I'd almost bet my life that the deceased didn't commit suicide."

"Which is as much as to openly charge that I did the crime!" Gambetta cried, fiercely.

"Well, it amounts to about the same thing, I suppose," Yreka retorted, coolly. "The fact is, you may count yourself lucky that you have got off so well, and you'd better muffle your notes, lest we take you yet, and run you up to the limb of a tree!"

Muttering some unintelligible threat, Gambetta turned away, and resought his sleeping apartment, while Hencoop ordered the parlor cleared of the crowd until morning.

Later, in his room—the sleeping rooms of the hotel were but partitioned by curtains—Yreka Jim examined the letter Hatch had given him.

A cry of surprise escaped him when he read what was scrawled upon the piece of paper, viz:

"Find Ruth Reynard, and protect her from enemies, who seek to destroy her. In order to find her, take the left boot from my foot, and wear it. There is a gold star fastened to the sole. That boot will guide you not only to Ruth Reynard, but to one of the richest secret gold mines in the country."

"HIRAM HATCH."

That was all, but it caused Yreka Jim much excitement.

Hastily seeking the Californian, he obtained entrance into the room where the corpse lay.

But the boots Hatch had worn were gone!

And it was subsequently revealed, upon searching, that the Gambettas had also taken a stealthy departure.

Had they taken the boots of the murdered man with them?

CHAPTER V.

YREKA AND ROMERIQUA.

"GENTLEMEN, Yreka Jim, of Yuba Dam, at your service!"

Several days subsequent to the events last narrated, three men sat in the cosily-appointed office of Miguel Romeriqua, the bonanza king of Death-Rattle, engaged in conversation, when the above salutation broke upon their hearing, and caused them to gaze around in surprise, if not, indeed, with a spice of alarm.

The trio consisted of Romeriqua, a well-built man with jetty-black eyes, hair and full beard; of a rough, brawny-limbed fellow of about thirty years, wearing a miner's habiliments, and possessed of a red, scarred face, brutal of expression, and a black, sweeping moustache of remarkable size; the third person was a tall, long-legged, superannuated individual, with a gaunt visage and a nervousness of demeanor that made him appear rather ludicrous at times.

The trio were engaged in some spirited discussion, which caused the man of the brigandish moustache to smite the office-table with his huge fist when the salutation was uttered.

Turning, they beheld Yreka Jim's handsome figure in the doorway, his equally handsome face smiling, his eyes keen and watchful without appearing to be so.

His personal appearance had undergone no change since he was at Hencoop City. He was the same dashing, elegant sport, with the conscious ease and grace of bearing that caused others to regard him with both admiration and fear.

"Yes, gentlemen; Yreka Jim, of Yuba Dam, at your service," he repeated, advancing into the office. "Suppose, however, you've not the honor of knowing me."

"I presume we have not," Miguel Romeriqua replied coldly, "nor do we care to, sir. Why have you intruded here?"

"Intruded? Why, I wasn't aware that a business call had come to be regarded as an intrusion."

"If you have called on business, sir, I am ready to wait on you. What is the nature of your business, may I inquire?"

"Well, I saw a notice to the effect that you were in want of a mine boss, and it struck me I might fill the bill."

"You are called Yreka Jim, you say?"

"Exactly—of Yuba Dam. Ever heard of me?"

"No; I believe not."

"You're lucky, then. I'm a bad man, generally speaking, w' nails in me boots. Live on luck, pluck an' pigeons, when I can't get an ear to chew off. Think I'd suit you?"

"Waal, ef we war allowed ter surmise, we shed say not!"

This came from the man with the big moustache in tones most emphatic, while his fist again smote the table so that the ink-stands rattled.

"Hey? You should say not, eh, my Christian friend?" and Yreka stepped around so as to get a good square look at the fellow.

"Might I trouble you to explain *why*—and, also, who *you* are?"

The rough uttered an oath, and glared at Yreka.

"I'll show ye who I am!" he cried, savagely. "I'll chew ye up, I will, in a holy sec-ont!"

"Pooh! you overrate yer chawing propensities, my friend, greatly. Do I look like a piece of meat and muscle as would be so readily masticated? Don't get too fast, or you may secure a chance to give us an exhibition of what you *can't* do. What I asked of you was, who *are* you, and how do you know that I won't make an A No. 1 mine boss?"

"This man's name is Gid Grinder, and he has been my chief mine boss ever since mining was opened in Death-Rattle!" Miguel Romeriqua interrupted. "The men have demanded an increase of wages, at Grinder's instance, and hence I advertised for a new boss. However, I presume matters will be amicably settled. Is that all, sir?"

"Oh no!" and Yreka seated himself upon a chair, and tipping back, lit a cigar. "Go on with your business with Grinder—I'm in no hurry."

"If you will be kind enough to state your business, we will settle *that* first," Romeriqua said, decisively.

"Oh! well, then, if you prefer, we will do so. I learn that you have offered a reward for information leading to the discovery of the whereabouts of one Seguin Senal, who rescued your daughter, Senorita Inez, from her runaway horse, up in the mountains?"

"I did offer such a reward, sir," and a change of expression came over the bonanza king's face—a more softening expression, it struck the sport. "Do you know aught of this gentleman's whereabouts?"

"I might be able to put you on track of him, providing the reward is satisfactory."

"Very well."

The mine-owner then turned to Grinder.

"I will hold your demands under consideration until to-night, Mr. Grinder!" he said, "when my decision will be reported to you. You will be excused now."

Grinder and his companion arose, the former looking dark and savage.

"Waal, we'll wait on ye, 'til then," he growled, "tho' ye might as well come ter time, fu'st as last, fer one thing aire sertain—yer present men won't work longer'n to-day, 'thout bigger wages, an' ef ye war ter pick up another gang, et won't be healthy fer 'em ter try ter fill our places. I'll person'ly guarantee ter kill ary galoot's durst try ter fill my position—an' yer know when I warble et's allers true notes!"

With this threatening assurance the mine boss strode from the office, followed by his superannuated companion.

Miguel Romeriqua stepped to the door, to satisfy himself that they did not linger on the outside, and then returned, and seated himself facing the sport.

"Now, sir, we will come to an understanding," he said. "You say that you know of the whereabouts of this fellow, Senal?"

"I do; but before betraying them, for any consideration, I must know *why* you offer the reward—what you propose to do to this Senal, when you discover him? You certainly must have some grudge against—"

"Pooh! certainly not. You entirely misconstrue my motive. This Senal did an act most brave, according to my daughter's report, in risking his own life to save hers, and I wish to offer him a substantial token of my gratitude."

"He would not accept it!"

"How do you know?"

"Because I know—that's all. He isn't made of that sort of metal."

"Well, anyhow, he could not refuse to accept my thanks. He must be a singular sort of fellow to keep so aloof. My daughter believes him to be in or about this camp."

"So he is."

"And you know where he can be found?"

"I do, for a certainty."

"Then, show him to me and I will pay you your price, providing, of course, it is not out of the bounds of reason."

"Romeriqua, you don't want to see Senal for any good purpose?"

Yreka Jim spoke so candidly that the mine-owner looked discomfited.

"I do—"

"Nonsense. What is the use of lying?" Yreka interrupted, sharply. "You can't deceive me, try as hard as you may. I can read you like a book. Senal possesses some damaging knowledge about you, and were you to get on track of him you'd set a trap to ensnare him!"

Romeriqua had grown pale, and gazed at the sport angrily.

"This is strong language for you to address to me, sir," he cried—"you a perfect stranger."

"Yet, none the less truthful!" Yreka replied, coolly. "You see the fact is, I have you down, pat, sir, without any trouble. You would seek to remedy one difficulty—conceal one crime, by taking upon your shoulders another. Don't start, or look embarrassed, my dear sir. The fellow, Senal, was a myth; I am the person who wore that name."

A half-tigerish cry escaped Romeriqua's lips, and he made a move as if to reach toward a drawer in the table.

He desisted, however.

A glistening revolver warned him to stop. The weapon had apparently dropped into the sport's grasp, from his coat-sleeve.

"Oh! don't trouble yourself to do anything rash!" Yreka warned. "I'm always as wide-awake as a terrier flea, where my personal welfare is concerned. Don't you think so?"

"Curse you!" Romeriqua breathed. "I could murder you!"

"Oh! I haven't a doubt about that. It bugs right out of your eyes, and I am sincerely sorry that I can't permit you to vent your passion on me. It would have been too bad, you know, for you to have harmed a poor myth of a fellow, like Senal, and so I took pity on him and stepped into his boots. And now, I presume you are willing to confess that your intentions toward the gallant rescuer of your daughter were not so chivalrous and grateful as you would have had me believe."

"You are a detective?" Romeriqua said, without noticing the other's speech.

"I am!"

"You have come here, to make me trouble, too?"

"Well—perhaps."

"Then, do you wonder I should feel like killing you?"

"Why, I don't know. In fact, I should suppose you'd count on it as a compliment, to be arrested by a good-looking young fellow like me. Why, some men would be so tickled that they'd trot right off and surrender themselves, without putting me to the trouble, even, to handcuff them."

"You're a fool!" Romeriqua growled. "If you came here with any idea that I would tamely surrender, you certainly made an erroneous calculation."

"Did I? Well, maybe so. But we are getting considerably ahead of matters. I have not even attempted to arrest you yet, have I?"

"Well, you might as well, seeing that such is your intention."

"There you are, now, off on a surmising tour—blundering into what you know nothing about. From recent developments bearing upon your past career, I expected to meet a stoically calm, and sensible villain!"

"Sir! I will not stand insult, no matter—"

"Tut! tut! Don't you get foxy, now; it won't pay. You are a villain as you know, and you ought to be proud of it, as it is not likely you'd have cultivated the qualification if you hadn't counted it as being quite the cute caper!"

"I am no villain. The force of circumstances brought me to do what is charged against me. Tell me, who are you employed by—who set you to work, searching for me?"

Yreka Jim drummed idly on the table a moment, as if undecided whether to answer the questions or not.

"The Government has tendered me a testimonial of recognition, for my services as a Western man-hunter," he said, finally, "but did not specially employ me, on your case."

"Ah!" and Romeriqua drew a breath of relief, Yreka fancied. "Then, your interest in hunting me down is private, is it?"

"Rather. Some months ago I had a mountain encounter with a wounded bear, and would have been a 'goner,' but for the timely intervention of a hunter, who chanced to see my predicament and came to my rescue. Afterward, we became—"

friends, and I learned that his name was Reginald Reynard, and he was a miner—at that time he was prospecting, near this town.

"As our acquaintance ripened, he seemed to take a strong liking to me, and told me that, several years before, he had taken his only child, of fourteen years—a promising girl—to Chicago, to finish her education, and had placed her under the temporary guardianship of his cousin, one Bayard Banks, a broker and grain speculator. He had also deposited in Banks's care, ten thousand dollars, out of which such sums as necessary were to be deducted, from time to time, to provide for the girl's education. Also, as he, Reynard, had no certainty of how soon he might die, owing to his roving life and habits, he had made a singular bargain.

"Perhaps another such a compact was never placed on record—anyhow. I never heard of one. Reynard caused you to put an insurance of ten thousand dollars upon your life, to unconditionally be made payable, at your death, to his, Reynard's daughter, Ruth, or, in event of her being dead, to her husband, if one survived her; or in case none did, to your daughter, Beulah. Then, Reynard placed a similar insurance upon his daughter's life, to be unconditionally paid to you or your direct heirs, in case of her death. The dues on these policies were then prepaid, for a term of five years, and Reynard returned to the West."

"Well?"

Romeriqua, for we shall still give him that name, had listened attentively, although his face was somewhat expressionless.

"Well, at the time of my meeting with Reynard, his daughter had been in your charge some three years, and during this lapse of time he had heard from her but once. This was about six months ago. Reynard explained to me that he entertained a great deal of anxiety about his daughter, and intuitively feared that all was not right—that you were not treating her squarely; and when he learned that I was a detective, he persuaded me to act as his agent, and go and look into the matter—ascertain if she was all right and his suspicions unfounded.

"After much coaxing, I consented, and I set out on my long journey. It now appears that, after I had been gone a week, Reynard came to his death, by being injured while blasting rock, and that he sent another courier, to represent him. As I stopped over in Denver two weeks, this man got a start on me, and when I reached Chicago, Ruth Reynard had disappeared at least ten days before, and it was supposed that she had gone West, to her father, of whose death I did not know.

"On my arrival, I learned that you, also, had come up missing, within a couple of days, and examination into your business affairs proved that you had not only embezzled Reynard's money a year before, and frightened his daughter into silence, through threats and abuse, but you had also forged notes and checks to the tune of many thousand dollars, and before your departure, had stolen of the funds of the firm of which you were a member."

"Well?"

Dry and rasping, Romeriqua uttered the interrogative, his face white, his eyes gleaming.

"Well, I had taken such an interest in Reynard, that the news of how you had ill-treated his daughter, and abused your trust, set my blood to boiling, and I swore I'd hunt you to the ends of the earth, if need be, and force you to make reparation and restitution. And I am here for that purpose!"

"You are?"

"I am, most emphatically."

"Well, what do you propose to do about it?"

"Well, you'll find out, before long. In the first place, you've got to make good the money you embezzled which belonged to the girl."

"What then?"

"Then you've got to tell me where you have the girl confined!"

"What?" and the speculator leaped to his feet in astonishment.

"Just what my angelic voice twittered," Yreka Jim responded. "It is known to me that Reginald Reynard had a secret mine of great value. The girl, Ruth, is now concealed in that mine. And, furthermore, if I mistake not greatly, you're the only man who now knows where the secret mine is located—and you murdered Hiram Hatch, at Hencoop Tavern, four nights ago!"

It was a startling accusation, indeed!

CHAPTER VI.

THE SPORT'S WARNING.

WHEN Yreka Jim entered the office, he had no idea whatever of making the charge of

murder; indeed, it had not occurred to him that Romeriqua might have been Hiram Hatch's assassin until a moment before he uttered the words.

So that, in reality, the accusation was but a "feeler," to see what effect it would have upon the mine-owner.

It plainly staggered him, for he grew deathly white, and reeled back a pace, clutching the table for support.

"By God!" he gasped, his tone expressing horror, "this is terrible! I commit a murder? Never! But as I may have been, I could never harden myself to do such a thing as that!"

It occurred to Yreka that he spoke the truth in this respect, yet it was against his detective sagacity to admit as much.

"That will do to tell, friend Banks," he said, dryly; "but you can't expect one of my profession to take any stock in such an assertion from you. The very fact that you contemplated giving me, *alias* Senal, a ticket-o'-leave from this fair earth, condemns you!"

"It is not so. I have never committed the crime of murder. The charge is outrageous!" Romeriqua declared fiercely. "The alleged murder you accuse me of I know nothing about—nothing whatever. I swear it, as God is my judge, and by my hope of forgiveness in the coming hereafter!"

"Oh! that's not necessary. I'd believe you just as quick without the oath as with it—every bit. Deny the murder, if you like, but you cannot deny that Ruth Reynard is a prisoner, and in your power."

"I do deny it, most emphatically. I know nothing of her whereabouts, although I have spared no pains in my attempt to find her. I have heard it rumored that Reginald Reynard owned a secret mine at the time of his death, and it is the current belief that it is located somewhere in the vicinity of Death-Rattle; but, further than this I do not know."

Yreka Jim was silent a moment, during which time he softly stroked his mustache.

"If I was sure of this," he finally said, "there would be nothing to hinder me starting at once for Chicago with you, and claiming the fat reward that is offered for your capture. But I don't believe you. I believe you know where Reginald Reynard's daughter is; mayhap, you have already murdered her, with a view to obtaining the insurance on her life as soon as the affair blows over. And until the mystery is cleared up, I shall not act as I would, otherwise."

"Do you mean that you will not arrest me?"

"I've not concluded to do so yet, although I certainly shall, if you do not conduct yourself quietly and civilly."

"After you become convinced that I am in no way conspiring against Ruth Reynard, and know nothing about her whereabouts, perhaps I can buy you off?" Romeriqua suggested, keenly. "I would of course pay many times the amount the Chicago authorities offer."

"Humph! You are not choice of your compliments! Do I look like a man who would accept a bribe?"

"That's neither here nor there. You'd be a fool to fish for a minnow when you might as easily catch a whale."

"Oh! well; time will best speak as for that. I believe you to be an arrant knave—even a more wretched villain than you have already been proven. You are virtually my prisoner already, and any attempt of yours to get away from this camp will be balked in the outset. Do you understand?"

"That on my good behavior will largely depend the length of my stay in Death-Rattle?"

"Exactly."

"Very well. I shall not be likely to forget." "And, another thing:—bear in mind that I shall be alive to any attempt you may make or cause to be made against my life, and any such action will bring down summary vengeance upon your head."

"I have no intention of turning a hand against you. On the contrary, if you want assistance, do not hesitate to apply to me, or my daughter."

"Ah! your daughter?" Yreka echoed.

"Yes. If it is true that you and Senal are one and the same person, my daughter has fallen dead in love with you, and, impetuous by nature, she cannot do too much for any one she loves."

"It is very likely that I shall not give her much opportunity to lavish tokens of her affection on me," Yreka declared. "By the way, one more question—then, I must tear myself away from your august presence. Do you know a man named Girard Gambetta?"

Romeriqua had resumed his seat a moment or

so before, but now sprung up again, in great excitement.

"Girard Gambetta!" he gasped, whitening—"Girard Gambetta! What do you know of him?"

"Not much—very little, indeed. But then, I intend to know more eventually, you see. What do you know of him?"

"He is the most relentless foe I have on earth, and pursues me with the tireless perseverance of a demon. Twice in my lifetime he has forced me into ruin, and it is he, more than myself, who is answerable for the state of my affairs in Chicago!"

"Ah! Then he holds a sort of spell over you—some power you cannot resist?" Yreka demanded.

"Yes! yes! He is a demon—a very human vampire, and I would to God he were dead. Tell me—where did you see him last? Was he coming here?"

"I presume likely, although I lost track of him. When I saw him, he and his son—or at least, I suppose it was his son, judging by the strong resemblance—were at Hencoop City!"

Romeriqua uttered an audible groan.

"Then they are in search of me," he uttered, more to himself than to Yreka; indeed, it seemed, for the moment, that the erring man was wholly unconscious of the sport's presence—"coming to renew their persecutions, that have made me the wretched being that I am. But, they shall not drive me a step further—I swear it!"

Then, seeming to recollect himself, he looked at Yreka, confusedly.

"You will excuse me," he said. "These enemies of mine sometimes drive me distracted, and I commune with myself aloud, without being aware of the fact, until afterward."

"So it appears. I must be going now!" and Yreka Jim took his departure.

"If I'm not off my reckoning, the beginning of the end has not begun yet!" he muttered, as he betook himself to the single hotel the camp afforded.

CHAPTER VII.

GRINDER WAXES WRATHY!

AS Yreka Jim has already explained, concerning his search for Ruth Reynard, it is scarcely worth while to add that his errand in Death-Rattle, was, if possible, to gain information concerning her whereabouts.

That it was not likely he would find her in the camp he felt satisfied; but, at any rate, by his interview with Romeriqua, *alias* Bayard Banks, he had formed some new opinions, if he had learned nothing not known to him before.

"Banks is a shrewd scoundrel, that's flat," was his conclusion, as he sat in the office of the hotel, smoking a cigar, and looking over the singular scrap of paper he had received from Hiram Hatch. "His fear of the Gambettas, no doubt, is genuine, and if they come here to Death Rattle, new developments may arise. It is my belief that they, too, are in search of Ruth Reynard. The question of the girl's whereabouts seems no nearer solution than before. If Banks does know where she is he is a bare-faced liar, and I'm not just prepared to conclude whether he does know of her whereabouts, or not. But, I'll find out. I promised Reynard I'd look out for her welfare, and I'll do it. Then there's the question of the murder of Hatch!—for I haven't a doubt but what he was murdered, and the pistol placed in his hand, after he fell. Did Gambetta shoot him? or did Banks, or Romeriqua, as he is known here? Here is a mystery alore, left for me to ferret out. I am inclined to the opinion:—"

His reverie was interrupted at this point by the entrance of the brassy mine boss, Gid Grinder, who plainly had been drinking hard, and approached the sport-detective with an important stride, his eyes bloodshot, and face ugly of expression.

"Waal, 'd ye git my job?" he demanded, hoarsely, resting his hands upon his hips and glaring at the sport as if he would like to annihilate him.

"I did not," Yreka responded. "I did not want it in the first place!"

"Oho! ye didn't, hey? What 'd ye come nosin' around fer it for, then?"

"I don't consider that any of your business!"

"Don't ye? Then I'll show ye the difference, cuss ye! When er galoot tries ter root in under my shanty and undermine it, I allow ter presume I've got suthin' ter say erbout et. D'ye hear my angel voice?"

"I hear your silly twitter!" Yreka replied,

promptly. "And now, Mr. Bloodeye, what do you want?"

"I want yer ter understand that I'm a bad man, wi' hair on my teeth!" Grinder boastfully declared, smiting the palm of his hand with his fist by way of emphasis; "an' more'n that, I'm a holy horror in this town, feared by man, dorg an' beast. That's ther identercal sort of a ore-crusher I am, an' don't yer fergit it!"

"Indeed! You don't look it!" and the sport smiled blandly, as he saw that bystanders were beginning to collect, and there was a prospect of a "jubilee," there and then. "Why, Mr. Blood-in-your-eye, I've seen pilgrims ten per cent. more ferocious-looking than you, who would run at the sight of a prairie wolf."

"Hev ye? Waal, yer kin jest bet yer buckles I ain't o' thet sort. I run this burg, I do, an' tho' I'm noted fer bein' a big horse on ther stab an' shoot, an' kin p'int with pride ter six graves I've filled hyer in Death-Rattle, I'm also noted fer hevin' a streak o' mercy now and then, an' that's why I'm heer!"

"Ah! Is that a blessed fact?"

"You bet! I don't make no bones thet you an' I can't breathe ther same atmosphere o' this camp!"

"No? What a pity—for the atmosphere!"

"One o' the other o' us hes either got ter git up an' mosy or else die wi' his boots on!"

"Horrible! How do you figure this out?"

"Clarer than bug-juice. I've tuk pity on ye an' cum ter give ye a chance ter skip out o' town 'twixt now an' sunset. Ef ye don't take ther chance, so generously offered you, ye'r a dead man!"

"Sho!" and Yreka gave vent to a whistle of mock surprise. "A dead, dead man, eh?"

"Deader than a chawed herrin'!"

"This is astonishing news to me, my dear Grinder. I had no idea I was so near my finis. Of what disease—what orthodox ailment, will I amble off this mortal coil, may I inquire?"

"You'll get yer cussed carcass filled full of cold lead—that's ther kinder disease ye'll die of!" Grinder growled, with an oath, "an' so ye can suit yerself. Ef ye want'er live, you'll need ter be lukin' fer another locality afore sunset, which ain't fer away."

"Indeed?" and Yreka Jim slowly arose from his chair, and stretched himself, with a yawn. "And, to sum the whole decimal fraction up to an equivalent, if I don't leave this camp you propose to fit me for a sepulcher!"

"You bet yer bottom dollar!"

"Well, now, Grinder, it looks to me as if you proposed a job very difficult to carry out, for I haven't the slightest idea of leaving this camp, to-night, nor do I propose to keep warm the several gross of bullets you intend to bury in my anatomy—nary a time. If you have got any particular grudge against me, that you want to wipe out, we'll mazourka right out upon the boulevard, and both take a hand in the settlement!"

There were ringing sarcasm and fearlessness in the sport's challenge, and he stood before the ruffian, his fine figure fully erect, and whole appearance imposing.

Like a gladiator of old, looked he.

For an instant, Gid Grinder looked as though his breath had been entire'y knocked out. He had fancied that his ferocious mien had badly frightened the sport, but now he began to realize his mistake.

Yreka Jim, to use a well-known vulgarity, "didn't scare worth a cent."

"Yer—yer don't mean ter say thet yer durst dare an' defy me?" Grinder gasped, incredulously—"yer don't want me ter chaw ye up an' spit ye out, 'thout givin' ye a chance to escape from town?"

"That's the precise, identical and particular thing I do want you to do!" Yreka responded. "If there's one thing more than another that I like to do, it is to take the brag and conceit out of a gander, like you. So mazourky right out into the street and we'll get down to biz!"

"Get out! I'm purty mean, I am, an' thar's plenty as will vouch for that!" Grinder replied, "but I'll be cussed ef I'm mean enuff ter take thet advantage o' ye. Why, I'd lick ye so quick ye'd swaller yer suspender buttons, me man. Pech! don't be so foolish when ye've got 'er chance to 'scape death!"

The spectators chuckled, audibly, at this.

Plainly, Grinder was growing more alarmed, each minute.

"There's no use of your trying to skin around the bush, Grinder!" Yreka said, good-naturedly. "Everybody sees that you're a first-water coward, and trying your best to crawfish. So if you will get down on your knees and beg my pardon, I'll let you off this time. If you don't,

you've got to trot right out into the street, and fight it out. That's the kind of an electric shock I am!"

"What! me tryin' ter crawfish—me? Waal, I should smile! Me git down on me knees, an' ax ther pardon o' the likes o' you—me? Waal, I should snort up a snappin'-turtle! Ef it's fight ye want, I'm yer huckleberry, right off ther limb, I am! I'll wind up yer little bobbin so quick ye'll forget when yer swallered pizen last!"

"Then move ahead! Let's open the ball with a grand march—into the street. Don't you see the crowd's impatiently waiting on us? They expect a treat, an' it's our duty not to keep them in suspense!"

Grinder glared savagely at the eager-faced bystanders, and uttered an oath.

"How d'ye want ter fight?" he demanded, turning fiercely upon Yreka Jim—"wi' what weapons?"

Jim laughed.

"Oh! you can have your choice, so far as that is concerned. It doesn't make a particle of difference to me! Pistols, knives, rifles, bow-and-arrow, clubs, dynamite, or fists—in fact, anything, any way, so that you are suited."

"Then, we'll fight with fists ter a finish!" Grinder declared, grimly, evidently having no confidence in his own skill as a pistol-shot, and at the same time realizing that the sport was liable to be an expert. "All I want aire one blow ter knock yer head clean off'n ye!"

And judging by the sledge-hammer proportions of his fists, it looked probable he could strike a terrific blow.

Out into the street the two men then proceeded, the crowd of course following to witness the set-to.

The opponents stripped to the waist without ado, and faced each other—both fine specimens of well-developed manhood.

They stood eying each other sternly, for a moment, and were about to begin the battle, when there was a tremendous yell, and a horseman rode into view, from behind a neighboring cabin.

And such a horseman was he.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STREET FIGHT.

THE stentorian yell of the new-comer, caused the two enemies to temporarily postpone the pugilistic performance, to gaze at the owner of the blatant voice, who rode up, and drew rein, with a drawling—

"Whoa! thar, Durocks! Behceve thyself, onruly beast!" and the owner gazed around at the crowd, which lined either side of the street, with a complacent grin, that once seen would not be soon forgotten.

Yreka Jim was perhaps the only one who recognized the man, who was a stranger in Death-Rattle.

It was none other than the irrepressible vagabond Colossus of the mines, Mambrinus Maccaw—the blatant, and, withal, good-natured bullwhacker, whose acquaintance the reader has made in the previous "Yreka Jim" novels.

But now if anything he was bigger, dirtier, and more absurdly comical than ever. Indeed, the seed wart upon the end of his huge nose seemed to have grown larger; his mouth had by no means decreased in size; and the clothes he wore had come to a state of general demoralization.

What was most startling, however, to the public eye, was not Maccaw, himself, but the animal he bestrode.

Now, be it remembered, the bullwhacker was not even a moderate giant in size, for he measured considerably over six feet, and was broad-shouldered, and of ponderous build, yet the great and only Maccaw, was but a pigmy, as compared with the equine he bestrode.

Never, in all their lives, had the spectators beheld a horse of such gigantic size. The first impression a sight of it created was that it must be a relic of the bygone era of mastodontic monstrosities. Indeed, so huge was it of frame, that an ordinary horse would have looked as a half-grown colt, beside it.

And the frame and hide were about all there was of the animal, for it was literally a skeleton—a gaunt, distressing spectacle, composed of skin and bones—bob-tailed, and minus one eye.

Its back somewhat resembled the ridge of a steep-roofed house, and yet Maccaw disdained to use a saddle. The only caparison the animal boasted was a halter around its neck, one end of which the bullwhacker held.

It will be remembered by the readers of these novels, that Yreka Jim and Maccaw were, in a certain sense, pards, who frequently lost track

of one another, and yet, always managed to meet again.

They had been thus separated, for several weeks, up to this moment when the giant put in an appearance at Death-Rattle—and, that, too, greatly to the surprise of Yreka.

"Whoa!" Maccaw repeated, as his monstrous steed opened its mouth, in a tremendous yawn, and stretched one long hind leg on a line with his body. "None o' yer funny bizness, now, Durocks, or cuss my character ef I don't cut short yer oats 'til ye'll git as thin as a shadder!"

Then, smiling again, at the crowd, he doffed his bullet-riddled plug hat, with Chesterfieldian grace.

"'Afternoon ter ye, pilgrims!" he cried, blandly. "Most happy ter see yer all here, bright an' bloomin'. My name's Maccaw—"

"Mambrinus Maccaw."

"Ther great he-up-an'-haw—"

from East Saginaw. This hyer's my Shetland pony—imported d'rect from Shetland—an' goes two-ten around the curve, to ther name o' Durocks. An' now, gentlemen o' ther jury, as I ther great hydra-headed hummin'-bird hev arriv' jest in time ter be in at ther funeral, what der yer say ter my actin' as referee fer this hyer cadaverous occasion?"

"I've no objections!" Yreka Jim answered.

"Ner I, pervidin' ye'll agree ter fight the winner!" Gid Grinder growled, with a malicious grin; for, confident that he would win, he had in view the fact that it would add so much more to his notoriety to also knock out the giant, which he had the unpardonable conceit to suppose he would do, with comparative ease.

"Great silver-sand jigs uv old St. Vitus!—me fight ther winner? Waal, I should snort up a snake, pardner! Ye couldn't tech me in a more sensertive locality. Fight ther winner will I, ef I hev to wade thr'u' a Mississipp uv blud. I'm not afeard—no sir-ee, bob-tail burro, in fly time. I'm ther great howlin' hydra-headed he-up-an'-haw, frum Hydrophobia Gulch—ther zephyr-like, mid-summer-night's-dream, frum Mud Creek, an' I kin jest equilibrate upon me uppers, an' lick ther lungs off'n ary man thet ever see'd er a sucker. So, git ready, thar, an' I'll umpire ther game, an' salivate the sarpiant as don't fight 'cordin' ter ther rules o' the Markis o' Huckleberry." And as he completed the harangue, the giant slid from his steed, as a rain-drop might roll down the steep incline of a roof.

"Now, Durocks, ye symmetrical Dianner, d'ye go over yonder, an' squat yerself, an' wait, like ther docile Shetland ye aire, 'til yer master offishewates at this hyer funeral!" Maccaw commanded, giving the beast a punch in the ribs that caused it to lay back its ears and show its teeth. "Git, row, an' none o' yer sassin' back, me merry maid uv Athens!"

Durocks had evidently been taught to obey, for she stalked away to one side of the street, and squatted upon her haunches, dog-fashion, greatly to the amusement of the crowd—for the spectacle was ludicrous in the extreme.

"Thar!" Maccaw said, with a satisfied nod. "Ye behold ther virtue o' fetchin' children up tew mind. An', now, we'll 'tend ter ther slug-gin'. Aire ye ready, gents?"

"Ready!" Yreka promptly responded.

"Ready!" Grinder echoed.

"That's the ticket! Advance an' let'er flick'er; an' remember, ther fu'st man as tries ter use a weepion gits salivated, slap-dab, wi' ther contents of my Long Thomas!" and drawing a large horse-pistol, the "great-he-up-an'-haw" flourished it in the air.

Without delay Yreka Jim and Grinder advanced quickly toward each other, and began to spar for an opening.

And one could see at a glance that Yreka Jim understood his business; he was light, agile and cautious, while, at the same time, he did not hesitate when an opportunity offered to do any effective work.

Grinder had evidently practiced the "manly art," too, for he maneuvered cleverly, and when he struck out, it was with force enough to have felled an ox.

But Yreka was not intercepting any of his blows, except in the way of parrying them.

Try his best, Grinder could not get in a stroke upon the sport—a fact that enraged him so much that he gradually became less cautious, and frequently left openings which Yreka Jim could easily have taken good advantage of, but did not. Evidently he wanted to play with his antagonist a while, as a cat does with a mouse, before getting down to business.

So he warded off the ruffian's blows, without becoming in the least "winded," while Grinder

by his savage exertions, was getting all out of breath.

"Great skippin'-rope dance uv ole St. Vitus!" cried the big bullwhacker, "why don't yous fellers do some business? Lor' Harry! aire ye afeard o' him, Yreka? Let him have a soaker on ther promontory, or ye'll hev ther durned galoot tired out. Hurra! thar, ye got one yourself, an' serves ye right, fer monkeyin'!"

It was true enough. In an unguarded moment Yreka had received a terrible blow upon the side of the face from Grinder's sledgehammer right fist, and it came within an ace of "downing" him.

But he quickly recovered his equilibrium, and was as composed and smiling as before, although there was a dangerous light in his eyes.

"Got kicked on the cheek by an' earthquake, an' et never swelled!" ejaculated Maccaw, dancing about in high glee. "Great hoppin' hornpipes ov old St. Vitus! but that war a sockdolager, tho'! Look, Yreka! The dewdrop is walkin' up now, an' his royal slithers wi' ther hoss's mane on his upper lip aire goin' ter get licked so bad, he'll allow he never knowed what er pummelin' war before."

Warming up to his work, the sport certainly appeared to be, for repeatedly he knocked down Grinder's guards, and hit the bully a tap in the face, thereby increasing his rage tenfold, if such a thing were possible.

"Hurrah! Great silver sand-jigs of old St. Vitus! thes ther way ter send in ther reports o' ther returnin'-board. I tell yer Yreka Jim doan't take a soaker in the jaw as meekly as ye all may suppose. He'll clean out ther thumper wi' the hoss-tail mustache, jest like chawin' cheese."

"If he does, yer got ter stand up afore him," a miner reminded.

"Oh! yer kin bet I will!" Maccaw declared, but in a way that carried with it the impression that he had no idea of doing anything of the kind.

The fighting now came down to stern principles, so far as Yreka Jim was concerned, and he planted blow after blow, full in Grinder's face, and in a manner that elicited howls of delight from the spectators, and enraged oaths from the recipient.

To save his life, Grinder could not hit his opponent now, while Yreka seemed to experience no difficulty whatever in punching him.

The bully's face soon began to present an appearance not unlike that of a battered piece of beefsteak, and his eyes were swelling shut.

Suddenly there was a rifle report audible, not far away, and Yreka experienced a stinging sensation in his left arm—knew the cause.

He had been shot!

Without uttering a sound, however, to betray the fact to the crowd, he set his teeth hard together, and leaping forward, gave Grinder a terrific right-hand blow, that carried the ruffian off his feet, and landed him upon his back.

He was clean knocked out!

Yreka had scarce struck the ending blow of the battle, when there was another rifle report, and he was conscious that he was shot a second time.

In vain he essayed to keep upon his feet long enough to reach the hotel. A terrible faintness came over him, and ere he had taken a dozen steps, he staggered and fell.

"He's bin shot! Some cowardly coyote hes plugged him!" roared the giant leaping forward, and glaring wildly around him. "Keep off, ye skunks, or I'll salivate ye! This aire me pard, aire Yreka Jim, an' ef he aire ticketed for Salt river ther street o' this hyer town shall be painted red wi' gore—by ther donkey-dance uv ole St. Vitus, yes!" and looking the picture of incarnate savageness, he waved the crowd back, not a man daring to disobey him.

Then he raised Yreka tenderly in his arms, and bore him into the bar-room of the hotel.

Depositing him upon a settee, the giant hastily tore open his shirt front, and a tiny bullet-hole was revealed in the left breast just above the nipple. It did not bleed much externally, a fact that caused the giant to look more serious.

"Too bad!" he growled. "If this pard o' mine swims up ther flume, this town gits decorated red, or my name ain't Mambrinus Maccaw. Whisky—some one git some o' ther best whisky in ther camp!"

"Here, sir; if you will allow me, I have an article of old rye, far superior to anything to be found in the camp," a stranger said, stepping forward and extending a half-filled pint pocket-flask. "There's guaranteed to be no poison in this."

The man was Girard Gambetta!

Maccaw looked up and regarded the Chicagoan keenly for a moment, as if trying to read him through and through.

"I reckon ye'd better keep yer whisky, me man," he said at length, the gruffness of his tone indicating that he was none too favorably impressed with Gambetta's appearance. "Ef there ain't no pisen in et, 'twon't do, 'cause et might make Yreka sick ter his stomach. Sum one fetch some bottled lightnin' frum ther bar, I say!"

"I must insist on your giving the gentleman some of this," Gambetta persisted. "It is a pure article, and will do him much more good than the rot-gut stuff you get here."

"Looker hyer!" and Maccaw turned upon the Easterner savagely. "Pears ter me ye'r pokin' yer proboskis inter somethin' thet's none o' yer bizness, me chickadee. Give me thet stuff, an' I'll try et on a dorg after I'm done wi' Yreka. Thar's no tellin' but it's pizen!"

And he snatched the flask from Gambetta's hands, and stuffed it down into one of his own pockets.

The Chicagoan turned away with a smothered oath, and walked out of the saloon.

Maccaw took note of the action, and set his teeth hard together but said nothing.

The wound in Yreka's breast needed no dressing in particular, for it was a clean cut, round puncture, made by a twenty-two caliber bullet.

As soon as the whisky came, the giant poured a liberal quantity of it down the sport's throat, bathed his forehead with it, and allowed a few drops of it to enter the wound.

This had the effect to cause Yreka to shudder violently and open his eyes.

His face, slightly pale, lit up with pleasure as he saw the bullwhacker standing beside him.

"Ye'r shot—plugged right thr'u' yer pulsometer," Maccaw announced, sentimentously; "so jest ye lay still, or you'll croak!"

"Oh, I guess not!" Yreka replied, with a faint smile. "The bullet didn't hit me very deep. It struck a bone and stopped. It ain't more'n a half-inch deep."

"Wait! I'll see ef 'tain't!" the giant said, grimly, and stooping over, he applied his lips to the wound.

There was a convulsive movement of his lips and cheeks, and a moment later, when he raised his head, he held the small bullet between his teeth.

"That's right!" Yreka said. "Now pour on a little more bug-juice, put on a patch, and I'm all right, 'cept a slight scratch on my left arm."

Maccaw obeyed the instructions, whereupon Yreka arose to his feet, as if nothing had happened.

But that he overestimated his strength became quickly apparent, for he had taken only a few steps when he fell suddenly forward on his face.

"This is no place for him," a miner said to Maccaw. "Fetch him to my cabin, an' I an' my old woman 'll help to nuss him."

The offer was so candidly tendered, that the giant nodded assent, and the two raised Yreka's limp figure, and bore him out of the hotel to the humble cabin of the miner, not far distant.

Here he was laid upon a couch, and the miner, who was something of a surgeon, set to work and fixed up the wounds as best he could, and succeeded in bringing the sport back to consciousness.

Yreka was very weak, however, and soon fell asleep.

"Let him sleep!" the miner said. "It will strengthen him, and he'll be apt to need strength afore the night's over."

"What d'ye mean?" Maccaw demanded.

"What I say. As we cum along I noticed that Miguel Romeriqua had put out a notice refusin' ter pay ther advance in wages demanded by the miners."

"What has that to do with my pard?"

"A good deal. Gid Grinder allows that this feller has been tryin' to cut him out as mine boss, an' he's bin pumpin' the miners full o' stuff to ther effect that it's thr'u' Yreka Jim's interference that Romeriqua won't give better wages. Ther boys don't like it a bit, an' I've heard it hinted that there was a notion among 'em ter give Yreka his shroud ter-night."

"Then why did you propose to fetch 'im hyer?" the giant demanded, quickly.

"Because ef et comes ter a case o' necessity he can be hid!" the miner answered, significantly.

"That's all I kin tell you just now."

"It'll answer," the giant asserted, only too glad, now, that Yreka had been brought to the cabin, for this rough, illiterate mountain of flesh and bone had grown to love the dashing sport with a brotherly affection.

CHAPTER IX.

MAKING TERMS.

WHEN Girard Gambetta left the hotel, he was met on the outside by his son, Morrell, and the two walked toward the office of Miguel Romeriqua in silence.

The face of neither wore a very satisfied look—that of the elder being dark and gloomy of expression.

When they reached the mine-owner's office, they found the door locked, and looking in, at the window, saw that no one was inside.

"We will try his house!" Gambetta decided. "I don't believe he has scented our arrival already."

"If he has, he will be prepared, eh?" Morrell asked.

"Bah! His preparations amount to nothing. He dare not defy me!"

The Chicagoan spoke positively, and his eyes glittered with conscious triumph.

On their arrival at the residence of the mine-owner Gambetta's knock was answered by a Chinese, flat-faced and almond-eyed, who was the sole specimen of his kind in the camp.

"Mistler l'Romerika not to home!" he said, with a grin.

"Get out, you idiot!" the elder Gambetta grunted, pushing the servant aside, and gaining entrance. "Out of the way with you, or I'll wring your infernal neck! Come on, Morrell—we'll see who's at home!"

The Chinaman shrunk back in alarm, and the Gambettas entered the parlor of the dwelling.

There, seated at a writing-table, looking pale and nervous, was Miguel Romeriqua.

Two large caliber revolvers lay in front of him, on the table, and he grasped these as the Gambettas unceremoniously walked in.

Girard Gambetta's keen eyes saw the action, and he laughed sarcastically.

"Oh! don't try to make a show of yourself, Bayard!" he said, helping himself to a seat. "I wouldn't, if I were you, because, what will it avail you? True, you might shoot at us—possibly hit us—but that wouldn't help your fortunes any!"

"Wouldn't it?" Romeriqua sneered. "I am not so sure about that. It would rid me of—you!" and he spoke with intense bitterness.

"That wouldn't better the matter any," Gambetta assured, "but would tend toward bringing you to the justice that has such a yearning for you. In event of my death, matters are so fixed that you wouldn't remain one night out of jail."

"Bah!"

"Oh! scoff at the idea, if you like—so much the keener will be your remorse, and the greater my triumph. I'd be a fool to follow you, and run the risk of being murdered, without having matters so arranged that my death would be summarily avenged. So, now, I'd advise you to cool yourself down, and we'll talk business."

"I have no business with you to talk about, you human bloodsucker!" Romeriqua cried, hotly. "Your power over me is at an end, Girard Gambetta. You shall never grind another penny out of me!"

"Not? Well, maybe you are right; then, again, maybe you are wrong. It all depends upon yourself, and your course of treatment of us. I have always been moderate with you, and you ought not to kick at this late stage of the game. By the way, I forgot—this is my son, whom you have not seen since he was a mere boy."

Bayard Banks gave the sallow young man a single disdainful glance, and taking a bottle and glass from a closet in the writing table, poured out a glass of wine, tossed it off at a gulp, and then restored the bottle to the receptacle.

"Humph! that's cool!" Girard Gambetta ejaculated. "You're not at all entertaining, friend Bayard—or, perhaps I should call you, Romeriqua!"

"No, I am not!" the mine-owner retorted. "If you want a drink, there's poison sold at the hotel bar."

"Thank you. I am not so thirsty that I would deprive myself of your society to seek a drink."

"Well, what do you want here? Why have you invaded my privacy, when you know yourself to be a thousand times unwelcome?" Romeriqua demanded, nervously, fingering his revolvers.

"Now, you're talking more like it," Gambetta said, complacently. "There's nothing like getting down to business. In the first place, I presume you are of the opinion that we have come here with the intention of extorting more money from you?"

"It is but natural that I should suppose so!" Romeriqua retorted, with a scowl.

"Well, perhaps you are right, when we come to review the past. But let that all drop. I come here for a different purpose."

"Well?"

"I come not as a foe, but as a friend, unless, of course, you prefer my enmity to my friendship—then, the gallows awaits you. It can all be easily arranged so that the book of the past can be forever and hermetically sealed."

The scowl did not lift in the least from the mine-owner's brow.

"I presume very likely," he answered, "that your overture will be met with a prompt refusal. However, I will endeavor to hold my patience in check long enough to hear you through. So go ahead."

"With pleasure," Gambetta assented, blandly. "Mine, as you know, has been an unfortunate life. All the speculations I have undertaken have been blank failures, and my capital accordingly lost. Several times I've been compelled from sheer necessity, to solicit aid from you—"

"Bah! you should say 'extort!'"

"Oh! well, it all amounts to the same thing. This money might have been the basis of a fortune to some men, but it was not so to me. You see me before you, to-day, with but a very few dollars in my possession."

"Humph! I expected as much. Why does it cost you so many words to make your demand for money, and have it refused?"

"Gently! gently! now. As I said before, to-day finds me with but a very few dollars in my possession. The future has no bright prospects in store, except through you. Now, you well know what a man gets if caught, for murdering his wife in cold blood merely for the insurance money upon her life. His punishment is death on the gallows, and the fate is none too harsh!"

Romeriqua's face had turned a greenish pale, as he listened, and his fingers worked more nervously than before about the triggers of the revolvers.

"Curse you!" he gritted. "Can you think of nothing else to arouse my temper? A bullet crashing through your brain may suddenly apprise you that you have been too funny!"

"Bah! You dare not shoot me, Romeriqua. Murderer that you already are, you have too great a dread of the gallows to kill me. But, why prolong our interview with quarreling? I have come here to make a proposal that you should hail with delight and enthusiasm."

"You are rich. You own the major part of the mining interests in this camp. You, no doubt, have money, besides. And last, but not least, you have a daughter. Now, what I have to propose, is this: Let's unite our fortunes and destinies, and thus forever seal the book of the past. Make Morrell and I equal partners with you in your mines, and give my son your daughter's hand in marriage, and the matter is settled—the book of the past forever sealed, and a load lifted, no doubt, from your mind. Do this, and I swear that no word from me or Morrell shall ever betray you, and that, instead, it shall be our honest aim to shield you from any trouble that may arise from the Chicago complications."

Gambetta arose from his chair as he spoke, and looked the picture of earnestness, while his voice had an honest ring.

Miguel Romeriqua eyed him sternly.

"That is a very remarkable proposition!" he remarked, coldly. "After you have extorted money from me for years, by threats, you now propose to have me take the serpent to my bosom and warm it, that it may have another opportunity to sting me."

"You are entirely wrong. I have no such evil intention. I wish to settle down into a quiet, lucrative position, see my son well married, and live on friendly terms with you. I don't see anything to hinder our burying the past, and being partners and friends. It will save me the trouble of playing the villainous role any longer, and will be a positive safety-buoy, to you, from exposure, and an ignominious fate."

"Why do you propose that our children shall marry? I am satisfied my daughter would reject such a proposal with derision."

"Bah! what of that? Are you not her parent, and is she not in duty bound to obey you?"

"No. She is headstrong and does pretty much as she pleases!"

"Maybe so, but when she comes to know that the union will save your life—you can approach her in a roundabout way if you don't want her to know the truth—I fancy she will only be too

glad to consent. My object in the consummation of this marriage is simply because I believe it will tend to cement our interests and make matters more pleasant, and then there will be no likelihood of our fortunes going out of the family."

"And suppose I peremptorily refuse to have anything to do with your scheme?"

"Then you need not expect any mercy from me. I shall not demand money of you, but shall seek revenge! You ought to know what that signifies."

Romeriqua was silent several minutes ere he made any answer, plunged in deep meditation, evidently.

The Gambettas waited patiently. Well could they afford to wait, for they were satisfied that Romeriqua would feel constrained to come to their terms.

"There's another matter," Girard Gambetta now added, "that may accelerate your decision. I refer to one of your own pet schemes by which you hope to make a raise of a cool ten thousand!—the Ruth Reynard case."

"What of her?" Romeriqua demanded fiercely.

"Oh, considerable! You would like to find her, pretty bad, and then if she should shuffle off this mortal coil you'd be entitled to ten thousand dollars from a Chicago insurance company."

"Well?"

"But, as ill-fortune would have it, you could not then conveniently obtain the money because you dare not go to Chicago."

"Pooh! That matters not. An insurance inheritance is transferable."

"So it is, and were you and I partners, the matter could be so arranged that there would be no trouble in getting the policy principal. Then, too, if we affiliate, as I have suggested, there will be no trouble in finding the girl."

"Ah! how do you know that?"

"It matters not. I have a clew that, when set at work, will find her and Reginald Reynard's secret mine as well."

"Bah! I don't believe it."

"You will when you see the proof. The girl was spirited away from Chicago by a man named Hiram Hatch."

"I don't know anything about that."

"I do, however. A few nights ago, at Hencoop City, this man, Hatch, was shot and killed by an unknown assassin."

"Well?"

"Well, before he died, he gave a paper to a sport, who called himself Yreka Jim."

"Ah!"

"Exactly. I suspected that the paper related to the whereabouts of Ruth Reynard, and made up my mind to know its contents. When Yreka Jim went to his room, and spread the document out before him, I stood behind his chair and read all that was written thereon."

"Ha! You did?" and Romeriqua's face expressed great interest.

"What did you read?"

"This!" and Gambetta handed the mine-owner a verbatim copy of the document Yreka Jim had received from Hiram Hatch.

Romeriqua perused it eagerly, his face betraying considerable surprise.

"And these boots?" he demanded, at length looking up.

"Are in my possession. On reading the message over Yreka Jim's shoulder, I stole downstairs, secured the boots and fled."

"And have you any faith that the boots will have anything to do with discovering the hiding-place of Ruth Reynard? To me, the idea seems preposterous."

"I have the greatest faith. Hatch would not have left this message except there was something in it."

"Perhaps not."

"Of course not!" Gambetta assured. "By the way, did you know this Hatch?"

"I have seen him, but, until you told me, never suspected that he was in any way connected with Ruth Reynard's escape from Chicago. I did, however, suspect, when I saw him here in Death-Rattle, that he was a detective—"

"And followed him to Hencoop City and shot him?" Gambetta finished, triumphantly. "You might as well out with it, for you know 'tis said that confession is good for the soul."

"Curse you! would you brand me with yet another crime?" Romeriqua cried. "Beware! I'll not stand too much! I know nothing about Hatch's death, nor was I in any way concerned in it."

"Oh, well! we'll not quarrel about it. Of course, you know that I know you are none too

good to do it. And now, what decision do you make relative to my proposal?"

"I don't know. While I might possibly conclude to do as you have suggested, I do not yet know what my daughter will say. If she is opposed to the concession—"

"Bah! don't allow any ifs nor ands about it," Gambetta expostulated.

"If she refuses, shut her up, and keep her on bread-and-water till she consents. In the mean time we will find this Ruth Reynard, and dispose of her case, according to mutual agreement."

"But this sport, Yreka Jim. He is a detective; he is here in Death-Rattle, and has threatened to give me up to the law!"

"Ah! he has? Was he sent by your Chicago creditors?"

"No! He is working in the interest of Reginald Reynard and his daughter."

"Have you talked with him?"

"Yes. He called upon me, a short time before the street fight, and literally bearded me in my own den."

"How much does he know?"

"All about my Chicago matters, and also of my intentions toward Ruth Reynard!"

"Humph! He is more dangerous, then, than I first supposed. You know that he has been shot?"

"I ought to!" and Romeriqua smiled significantly. "Is he badly wounded?"

"I don't know."

"Well, it matters not. If he don't die of his wounds, he is not long for this town. Did you notice the card tacked up on the door of my office, refusing to grant an advance in wages?"

"I did."

"Well, that will settle the sport. If the miners don't skin him alive to-night, I shall be disappointed. Grinder will lay it all to the sport, that I did not come to the terms demanded, and he's a desperate devil, and will no doubt raise a riot against Yreka Jim."

"Good! And now, is it settled that we are to affiliate; and work together as brothers and partners?"

"Do you swear, then, never to betray me?"

"I do, by all I hold sacred; and in speaking for myself, I also represent my son!"

"Very well. Then it is settled. From this day you are my partners, so long as you stick to your promise. I will now call my daughter and approach her on the subject!"

"That is not necessary!" a feminine voice cried, and out from behind one of the heavy curtains, at the rear of the parlor, stepped Beulah Banks, otherwise known to the reader as Inez Romeriqua.

Her figure was drawn proudly erect; her face was pale, and her eyes flashed with spirit.

She had been an eavesdropper, and had heard all!

CHAPTER X.

INEZ'S DECEPTION.

So accusing was the glance of Inez Romeriqua, as she confronted the schemers, that they looked decidedly ill at ease.

"Ha! is it you?" the mine-owner gasped, and not knowing exactly what to say, or do. "Why, Inez, never thought you would be guilty of playing the spy!"

"Didn't you?" the young woman replied, with sarcasm. "Well, you know it, now. I consider fortunate that I *didn't* play the spy. Oh, to think that I should have so long clung to you, a murderer!—conscience terrible!"

"Stop!" Romeriqua cried, springing to his feet in rage. "Do not dare to address me in this way, girl!"

"I do dare!" Inez retorted, fearlessly, "and I do dare you! I have overheard all your villainy and self-deceit, and you are no longer a parent of mine. I shall be the aim of my life to thwart you in all your villainous doings, in the future."

"We shall see!" Romeriqua cried. "You are not child, and in duty bound to obey me."

"Of course you are," Gambetta chimed in. "I rest with you, girl, whether your father lives in peace and plenty, or goes to the gallows. Unless you act sensibly, and come to our terms, which when that you marry my son, I shall have your father rested, and his punishment will be death, by hanging!"

"All of which he richly deserves!" was Inez's haughty retort. "He murdered my mother. I have clung to him, as many another daughter could not have done, through all his other criminal offenses, hoping by my affection to redeem him from the lost. But, I have plain enough proof, that he is too bad to be saved. If the law has him I shall not raise a finger to save him!"

She spoke with almost fierce decision. Romeriqua heard, with blanching countenance, and knew that she was but just. He had not served her affection, nor even her respect. Grinder He would not be thwarted, however. In a c

emergency, like this, it was necessary to adopt harsh measures.

"This is very extraordinary and very dramatic talk to come from you, girl," he said, angrily, "and your spirit needs to be curbed. Therefore, until you conclude to do as I want, I shall shut you up, on a diet of bread and water!"

"You—you will shut me up?" Inez cried, her eyes glowing with the fury of a woman's righteous anger.

"Yes, I!" the mine-owner replied. "You will find that I am master here, and if you attempt to leave this room, or resist my will, I'll add another crime to my calendar, by shooting you down, as I would a dog. Understand me, I am now desperate, and will brook no resistance!"

"Quite correct!" encouraged Gambetta—"quite correct. The girl needs breaking in, dear Bayard. Shut her up, to be sure, until she concludes to be sensible and marry my son. Give her bread and water, and don't forget to dose the water plentifully with salt. That will fetch her to her senses!"

Inez gazed at the trio of conspirators with a shudder, her indignation not unmingled with horror.

That her own father could be the monster he now appeared to her, had never occurred to her as possible; consequently the shock upon her nerves was stunning.

She saw, only too plainly, that her parent was desperate in his villainous purpose, and, added as he was by the equally evil Gambettas, how could she hope to hold out in warfare against their wishes?

She knew if they locked her up, there was no prospect that she would be released, until she consented to marry Morrell Gambetta.

Such a union would be a mockery and a sin, and she could never for a moment favorably entertain it—not she would die before she would marry him!

But one man did she care for, and he was the sport, Yreka Jim. Ever since their interview, she had planned and plotted how to win him, for win him she would, if it were a possible thing.

But, how get out of the present difficulty, and avert being locked up? was the question that flashed through her mind as she stood there, haughty and speechless, before the conspirators, whom she might well regard as her most dangerous enemies.

"You'd better act sensible now, and not make a fool of yourself," Romeriqua suggested. "Gambetta and I have concluded to affiliate, and by so doing, I will be able to keep my enemies at bay, and for the future our lives will run smoothly. Your marriage will cement all our interests, and eventually, you and Morrell will, by our deaths, be left the happy possessors of a handsome fortune. Morrell, you are willing to marry my daughter?"

"If it will cancel the feud so long existing between yourself and my father, I am, sir!" was the prompt response.

"So you see," Romeriqua went on, turning to his daughter, "there is but for you to consent to make matters right. Just think how much trouble for me, and general unhappiness, your refusal will cause. Then, too, it is nothing so terrible that is required of you. Morrell is an honorable, well-educated and attractive young gentleman, worthy of any young woman in the land. He is possessed of just and sterling principles, and there can be no doubt but what your union with him would be fraught with happiness."

"I presume you will admit that I am better prepared to judge about that," Inez replied. "A woman ought to be a better judge of her own destiny than a man. However, we will not discuss that. I consent to become a party to this villainous transaction, it must be with one distinct understanding—may, two."

"Ah! and what is it you want understood?" Romeriqua demanded, while the Gambettas looked east.

"First, that I am to be granted a week's time to prepare for this marriage. Secondly, that you are to seek or in any way harm the poor fatherless, helpless, deeply-wronged girl, Ruth Reynard!"

"To which I agree, without the least hesitation!" Romeriqua declared, with apparent heartiness.

"Good!" Girard Gambetta said. "What I most desire is to settle down to a peaceful, sinless life, and make use of the future in doing good, to atone for the sins of the past."

"And all three of you swear to offer Ruth Reynard skum?"

"We do," Romeriqua and the Gambettas declared, in a voice.

"Very well. It is not necessary to discuss the matter any further, then, at present. I will take your word, and marry Morrell Gambetta, one inch from to-day."

Not Inez swept from the apartment, with the tiny carriage of a queen.

and trio remained silent, until they heard her descend the stairs, to her own room; then Miguel Romeriqua spoke:

"She works well. She is a sensible girl when she has the necessity of being so. She will be as good a help as I need."

"Fact expect us to be as good as curs!" Gambetta said.

"Ah! for that!" responded Romeriqua, snapping his fingers, contemptuously. "What we may expect, in regard to Reynard's girl, can easily be redressed, and we can work without her knowledge."

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concerned," Gambetta declared. "I owe him a grudge, and have a plan that will insure his disposal."

"What?"

"Why, simply this. I will hint to your mine boss, Gid Grider, that you stand in fear of Yreka Jim, and don't raise the wages, on his account—that were Yreka Jim put out of the way, you would grant the advance without hesitation. Ha! ha! I fancy that would suffice, eh?"

"Heavens! yes. The whole camp would rise in arms against the sport!" Romeriqua averred, looking diabolically evil.

While in her own apartment, Inez paced the floor, her face white, her lips compressed, her eyes flashing.

"What! I marry that man!" she murmured, with a shiver of disgust—"no, never! They think they have got me for a dupe, but they shall ere long find their mistake. Though I am a murderer's daughter, thank God I am untainted with crime; and it shall be no fault of mine, if Justice does not obtain its recompense. They imagined I believed them, when they promised not to harm Ruth Reynard. Bah! I'd as soon believe Satan, in all his blackness. Though but a weak woman, they shall find me an enemy to their evil designs, to the bitter end. They shall regret that they did not kill me. They mean harm to the sport, Yreka Jim, but it shall not come to him if I can prevent it. An opportunity now lies before me, whereby I may be able to win his respect, at least, and I shall not hesitate to take advantage of it. By assisting him to find and befriend Ruth Reynard, I can perhaps interest him in me, so that, eventually, he will come to regard me with favor. Then, how happy I should be! Oh! Yreka, Yreka, I would willingly give up my life to win your love!"

Her face gained color, her eyes glowed with the warmth of tender, yearning passion; there could be no doubt but what her professed infatuation for the dashing sport-detective was genuine.

A girl of warm, impulsive nature was the daughter of the mine-owner, but she despised that which was in any way wrong or wicked, and with a will as firm as adamant, it looked decidedly as if the conspirators had aroused a most dangerous enemy.

CHAPTER X.

"BUSINESS."

NIGHT drew on apace over the rugged mining-town. There was no moon, and the somber pall of clouds that had covered the heavens, the latter part of the day now deepened into a black, threatening mass.

The employees of the mines quit work soon after Gid Grider's encounter with Yreka Jim, and when it became generally known to them that Miguel Romeriqua had refused to grant the advance in wages, they gathered in knots in the street, and at the hotel saloon, to discuss the situation.

Grider, by the way, had been badly knocked out, and did not recover consciousness until fully an hour after he received the telling blow. His eyes were then swollen nearly shut, his face bruised and distorted, and his walk very groggy.

As soon as he recovered his senses he called for whisky, and gulped down a large glassful of the fiery stuff.

A crowd of grim-faced miners and roughs of the camp, watched him inquiringly, for he was a sort of lord among them, and they knew there must certainly be a "jam-boree" to pay up for the defeat the rough had sustained. That Grider would permit the affair to pass without revenge, everybody knew was highly improbable, for even in his mildest moments he was surly, ill-tempered and vicious.

"What is he?" he demanded, in a hoarse whisper, as he glared about him. "What's the feller that slugged me?"

An explanation was made at which Grider gave a grunt of disapproval.

"Shot, hey?" he said, "an' at Jim Fletcher's cabin? Hope he don't croak. An' now, while I'm greasin' my buzle, some o' you fellers go an' hang craps on the door-knob uv ther town!"

That was all he said just then, but it was significant enough to those who heard it! It meant that there was murder in the man's heart.

He got up and staggered to the bar and procured another drink. Then he paced unsteadily up and down the room, his gaze riveted upon the floor, his countenance fierce of aspect, and terrible to look upon, battered and blood-stained as it was.

For some time he continued to stride to and fro, then he drank another bumper of whisky, and appeared considerably more straightened up.

"Hes Romeriqua put out ary notis, yet?" he demanded.

"Yes. He refuses to increase ther wages," a miner said.

"He does, hey?" and Grider gnashed his teeth.

"Yes, and I can tell you why," Girard Gambetta remarked, he having come for that very purpose.

"You can?" Grider growled, glaring hard at the Chicagoan. "Waal, now, who and what be you?"

"I am a gentleman, and a friend of your employer—will be a partner of his in the course of a few days."

"The devil ye will! What's ther reason we don't git ther advance, ef ye know so much?"

"I don't know that I ought to tell, for Romeriqua is chary about his failings," he began, known, Gambetta said, with pretended reluctance.

"Ye'd better spit it out, ef ye don't want more trouble," Grider snarled, savagely. "My temper ain't as sweet as new clover honey, just at present."

"Well, you see, Romeriqua and this Yreka Jim are enemies, and the former is afraid of the latter—so much afraid that he scarcely dare say his life is his own. Therefore, as it is against Yreka Jim's

wishes, he d'nt raise the wages until Yreka Jim is out of the way. That's the truth of the matter, and if it wasn't for Yreka Jim, your wages would be increased at once."

A murmur of surprise and indignation followed the Chicagoan's bare-faced lie, and the faces of the miners darkened ominously.

In truth, their wages were considerably less than were paid in other mining localities, and that a total stranger should be the cause of their not receiving what they were justly entitled to occurred to them as being an outrage.

Gambetta's declaration was received by Grider with an oath.

"So ther sport aire ther cause, hey, an' not Romeriqua hisself?" he demanded.

"Exactly," Gambetta assured. "Yreka Jim is the sole cause of your not getting honest wages. He's a scaly customer at best. They had him arrested in Rocky Run for stage robbery, but could not do anything with him owing to lack of evidence."

This was another lie; but lying was a pastime for Gambetta, whose whole life was a lie.

"Waal, one thing's settled. He won't git off this time so easy. Boyees, ye heer what this man tells us?"

"We do!" was the answer of the crowd.

"Of course ye do, an' ye'll all agree that ther sport hes played et mean on ther hull ov us, not ter speak o' ther way he's painted me red!"

There was a grunt of assent, and likewise a smile, because of Grider's reference to his recent pummeling.

"You let he hee!" Grider continued. "He cum hyer ter Death-Rattle, fixed up, an' fantastic, an' meddled wi' what war none o' his bizness, an' interfered wi' our bread an' butter. Et's a durned insult an' outrage, an' hyer's one, wot sez we ain't er goin' ter stand it. I'm fer bevin' a squar' deal, allus, but I'm fer revenge now. Walk up hyer ter ther bar, an' pour out his pizen, every man thet's in favor o' yankin' Yreka Jim up ter ther limb uv a tree. Set out ther arsenic, barkeep, an' ther glasses, an' I'll fut ther bill when the boyees hev got th' tanks full."

There was a general shout of approval, and full three-score of men crowded up to the long bar, two thick, to manifest their desire to wreak vengeance upon Yreka Jim, as well as to take advantage of Grider's unusual liberality.

And as drinks innumerable were partaken of in the next half-hour, and the dormant spirits of the stolid miners warmed to a fighting pitch, the prospect in store for the man from Yuba Dam, was not exactly pleasant to contemplate.

These men of Death-Rattle meant business!

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTERIOUS VISITOR.

IT was growing dark when Yreka Jim awakened from his sleep, and opened his eyes.

At first he was very much bewildered, and could form no idea where he was. He saw, at a glance, that he was not at the hotel, and so lay a few moments, trying to regain command of his mind sufficiently to locate himself.

The room where he was lying was some twelve feet long by ten wide, and its only furniture, as revealed by the dim light that struggled in at the window, was the cushioned lounge upon which he lay, a common table, and a couple of chairs.

He was the sole occupant of the room, and the two doors, which evidently communicated with other rooms, were closed.

When his thoughts were collected enough to remember that he had been shot, he made an attempt to arise, and succeeded in doing so, but the effort cost him considerable pain.

"I wonder where I am?" he muttered, sitting down upon the lounge, now conscious of his exceeding weakness. "This is not the hotel, that is certain. Most likely I've been taken in by some miner's family."

At this juncture he heard a door close, and voices, evidently those of two men, in an adjoining room.

"Well, what's the music?" was asked.

"Music!" was the response. "Great fandango, flip-flops of old St. Vitus! The music aire sech as aire played at funerals—a dirge, I reckon ye call it."

"Ah! then the miners are up in arms?"

"You kin bet yer best bar'l o' bug-juice on't. Sum one hes bin tellin' 'em an' ther feller Grider, thet et's all Yreka's fault thet Romeriqua won't pay the advance o' wages, and I tell yer they're jest as mad as ther Lizness end uv a houn' in a horn, an' hev got 't all out and dried ter come hyer, bymeby, an' take Yreka out an' lynch him."

"As I feared Grider is a mean devil, and he holds a power o' influence over the majority o' ther miners. What he proposes they feel in duty bound to carry out."

"But, they sha'n't tech my pard Yreka!" was the grim declaration—"floating gazelles an' fightin' furies, no! Thet Yreka aire ther squarest feller thet ever shook a hoof, an' no one ain't goin' ter tangle his trumpet while this hydra-headed he-up-an'-haw kin howl."

"We will try to prevent harm coming to him," the miner said. "What time does the mob intend coming here?"

"Not afore dark, I reckon. They're down thar at the hotel, swimmin' in bug-juice, an' 'tain't likely they'll leave the bar 'til they've got their tanks filled, an' they're in fightin' trim!"

"Most likely not. We shall have to tell them that your partner is not here, and if they insist upon it, let them search the shebang."

"But, they will find Yreka!"

"No they won't. I'll hide him, and tell 'em he's

went away. But, you mustn't be here, or they'll know better. You had best go, and remain out of sight, until after their visit. If they don't see you, they'll think you and Yreka have gone away sure."

"Durned ef that ain't a good idea, so I reckon I better shpe, now. Yreka ain't woke up yet?"

"No. He may not awake till I'm ready to secrete him."

"Kin ye do et, so they won't get at him?"

"That I can."

"Then, do et, an' I'll drap around ag'in', after ther coast air clear. Mind! don't ye let any harm come ter Yreka, or down go-s yer shanty."

"Don't fear but what I'll look out for his welfare, as sharply as you would, yourself, s'r," was the assurance.

Then, Yreka Jim heard a door open, and shut, and knew that his giant pard had left the shanty.

By this time, he became so weak, that he was forced to lay back upon the pillows.

"It seems I am to be treated to a visit of mob law," he mused. "Wish I were as strong as I was before I received these cowardly bullet wounds. I'd defy the crowd of 'em, then. But, as it is, I wouldn't be able to make much of a defense. I wonder who Maccaw was conversing with?"

Then he again heard voices—one that of the man who had talked with Maccaw—the other that of a woman; so he concluded that he was the guest of some miner and his family.

But a few words low spoken were exchanged. Yreka was listening and gazing about the room, when he saw something that startled him.

There was a door at each end of the room, the one opening into the room where he had heard the voices being at his head; the other was opposite the end of the lounge.

This door he saw open, and upon the threshold stood a young woman.

As he lay in the dark corner of the room, he knew she could not see him as plainly as he could her. To close his eyes and feign sleep was his way of averting attention.

In a moment more he was conscious of her approach. Then she paused, and he felt her breath fan his cheek—knew that her face was near to his, and that she was gazing at him, steadfastly.

For a moment she stood thus, and then he heard her glide softly to the door, at his head, on reaching which, she crouched down and listened.

What was she listening for? Did she not belong to the house? or, was she a spy?

If so, for what purpose?

Yreka was asking himself these questions, when the voices in the next room were heard.

"Molly," Fletcher said, "d'ye know I'm in a quandary?"

"A quandary?" echoed the woman's voice.

"Yes, a quandary. I'm not satisfied!"

"Not satisfied? And why not?"

"Oh! because. You see, it strikes me we ain't gittin' paid enough. Here we are, guardin' an important secret for a hundred dollars a month, when we ought to be gettin' rich."

"Pshaw! you're too greedy. We're doin' well enough, I think."

"Well, I don't. D'ye know, I'm allowin' I've got a plan by which we can git rich, all at once. Then, all we've got to do is pack up our traps and go back East. Wouldn't ye like to go back East, Molly?"

"To be sure I would, dear. But, then, you know that's out of the question, at present."

"No such a thing. I'll jest tell ye why: My ears wasn't made for nothin', an' I've been usin' 'em a good deal, in the last twenty-four hours, an' hev picked up some points I've a notion to take advantage of."

"What are they, Silas?"

"Well, in the first place, Romeriqua would give a handsome pile o' money ter know where the gal is, and the mine. I'm allowin' he'd give enough ter make us feel comfortable rich, for the remainder of our lives."

"Why, Silas Fletcher! would you be so dishonorable, and unfaithful to your promise, as to give up that poor girl, to a man lik' Miguel Romeriqua?"

"I hain't said I would," Fle cher replied, in a dogged tone; "I was only jest supposin' the case. Tain't sayin' I'd do et, only ef we could make a raise of five or six thousand dollars, it would be a powerful help to us in our old age."

"Nonsense! Don't let me hear any more of this, from you, Silas—not a word of it! We're doin' plenty well enough where we are, and I'm sure that I'd rather be poor and honest, than rich and dishonorable. How do you know but what our patient is awake, and listening?"

"Nonsense. He'd be up and stirrin' if he was awake. He ain't one o' ther sort that kin lay still. D'ye know, Molly, there could be a lit o' money made through him, too?"

"How?"

"Well, you see, he is huntin' for the gal. Reynard sent him arter her, afore Ill Hatch went, but somehow, Hatch got the time on him, an' fetched the gal away. Yreka Jim has bin searchin' for the gal, ever since. Migu I Romeriqua knows this, an' et nettles 'em. Ef ther sport war ter wake up a corpse, in the mornin', per agreement betwixt me an' Romeriqua, I'd get a bulgin' wad o' money."

"Well, Silas Fletcher! I'm astonished—horror-struck! Would you, who have always borne such a spotless reputation, commit a murder, in cold blood? Oh Silas!" and the voice was full of distress.

"I ain't said I would—I was jest s'pesin' the case," was the reply.

Then silence ensued.

Yreka Jim had heard every word of the conversation.

So had the girl, crouching at the door.

He heard her arise, a moment later, and presumed that she was about to retire from the room.

No longer able to contain his curiosity, he sat up, on the lounge, just as she came near him.

He saw her face—saw that it was a most attractive one; that of a girl of some seventeen or eighteen years, lit up by a brilliant pair of eyes, and beautified by a mouth of tempting sweetness.

"Stop!" he whisp red, eagerly, putting out his uninjured hand, and trying to detain her. "Speak, before you go. Are you—are you Ruth Reynard?"

She stared at him, with unutterable surprise, for a moment, evidently greatly startled at his unexpected arousal; then still refusing to speak, she swept quickly past, and vanished from view, closing the door noiselessly behind her.

"I frightened her!" Yreka muttered. "I'll bet my life, however, that she is Ruth Reynard. And this Silas Fletcher knows who she is, and where she is concealed!"

Just then, a wild, awful yell arose from out upon the night—the chorus-yell of many brazen throats.

It sounded from the direction of the Death Rattle Hotel.

What did it signify?

Was the mob preparing to make its descent upon the cabin?

CHAPTER XII.

LOVE'S TREACHERY.

THE thought was far from a comforting one to Yreka Jim, for he knew, that, do his "level best" he could not stand up and fight, owing to his weakness—a singular weakness, considering that he had not lost much blood.

And, after what insight he had gained of Fletcher's character, it would not be fair to say that he cared to trust himself in that individual's charge.

What then, was he to do?

He was turning the all-important matter over in his mind, when he heard the door at the lower end of the room again open, and gazing quickly in that direction, saw that a woman again stood upon the threshold.

It was not the same one who had previously visited the apartment, Yreka perceived at a glance, and he fancied there was something familiar about the figure.

An instant later, the woman glided forward, and he then saw who it was—Inez!

She came close to his side.

"Yreka!" she said, anxiously, "are you badly hurt?"

"No not so very badly," he replied. "The wounds are of no account, but I'm very weak."

"It is too bad. You must get out of here. The whole camp is up in arms against you, and are coming here to lynch you."

"So I have understood," he replied, trying to appear calm and unconcerned.

"Yes, and there is no time to lose. You must let me assist you to escape from here, to a place of safety."

"You?" Yreka echoed.

"Certainly. If every one else turns against you, I will not. Having abandoned my father and my home, I, too, must seek safety elsewhere. So surely, you will not refuse to let me assist you when you are in imminent peril, and unable to protect yourself."

She spoke with such such evident feeling, that the sport detective was moved.

"No, I will not refuse to accept of such assistance as you may be able to afford me, Miss Banks," Yreka answered, promptly; "and am grateful for your kindness in remembering me. Are the roughs approaching the cabin yet?"

"No, but I fear they will, within a very few minutes. They are all congregated at the hotel, and are being harangued by Gil Grinder and Girard Gambetta; so we had better go at once."

"Where?"

"I know of a place, not far away, where you will be safe until you are fully recovered. Can you walk?"

"With a little assistance I guess I can make a go of it. We must leave quietly; I have no confidence in the man Fletcher."

"Nor I. Give me your arm, and I'll help you."

Yreka arose with an effort, and partly supported by Beulah, crossed the room, and entered the next one, which proved to be small and unfurnished. From this a door opened out into the gulch, and the two were speedily beneath the cloud-cast heavens.

No rain was falling, but a raw wind was blowing fiercely, heralding a storm.

Once out of doors, Yreka felt a trifle more refreshed, and was able to walk without much assistance from his fair companion.

In the direction of the Death-Rattle Hotel, the sound of a hub-bub of voices could be heard, culled occasionally, by the loud yell of some boozey rough, who had got more than his share of bug-juice.

"When you are safe beyond their reach, I shall be so glad," Beulah declared, as she led the way toward the lower outskirts of the camp. "These detestable wretches would tear you to pieces if they were to get hold of you."

"I only wish I was not so weak," Yreka replied.

"They'd wake up the wrong man then."

"I have no doubt you are brave enough to face and defy them all!" Beulah asserted, "but, discretion, just at present, happens to be the better part of valor. I hope for your speedy recovery, and shall do all in my power to be of service to you."

"Did I understand you that you had left your

father's roof, for good, Miss Banks?" Yreka asked, as they walked along.

"Yes, sir, I have!" was the quick response.

"Mr. Yreka, I have c ung to my father, through all his sinful career, until now, when, after being an eav, dropp r to an interview of his, with Girard Gambetta, I have abandoned him."

"Ah! Then, it was not without a strong cause."

"No. His rascality of the past, I was, daughter-like, inclined to overlook. But, to day, a new page of his life was opened to me. God only knows, it was a blow cruel enough, to have killed me. I need not tell you what it was I heard, but I can admit that I found my father to be a hardened villain, with murder in his heart. He even forced by dire threats a promise from me that I would marry Morrell Gambetta. I had to promise, to save being locked up. After due deliberation, I dressed myself, took what money I had, and left. If I die by the wayside, I will never go back to become a party to my father's evil designs. I am satisfied that he is irretrievably a desperate villain, and I do not want to live within the shadow of his sinfulness. Do you blame me, sir, for my resolve?"

"Certainly not," Yreka replied, heartily. "You are, rather, to be commended, I should say. I presume your father has evil intentions, toward me?"

"He has. It is the plan between him and Girard Gambetta, that you never escape from Death-Rattle alive. To insure that you do not, Gambetta has told the miners that you are the sole cause of their not getting an advance in wages, and that, as soon as you are put out of the way, the wages will be raised. Consequently the miners are not very much in love with you, just at present, and the fact of your whipping Gil Grinder will cause him to goad the men on to desperate action."

"Perhaps they will lynch Fletcher, if they can't find me?"

"Pooh! Fletcher and Grinder know one another, and if you had remained at the cabin I haven't a doubt but what the former would have given you up to the mob."

"I was none too confident of him. I hope the mob won't hurt him, however."

"Why?"

"Because, when I get well, I want to use him."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh! no way, in particular, more than that I think I can use him to good advantage."

"Or, in other words, utilize him as a pump," Beulah suggested.

"Well, not exactly."

"Oh! ye-, exactly. Why, I know what you suspect—that Fletcher knows where to lay hands upon Ruth Reynard. Perhaps you are right, for I fancy he always has more money about him than other miners who get the same wages."

"You are right. Fletcher does know where Ruth Reynard is, and as soon as I recover my strength I mean to make him tell me."

"I doubt if you succeed. He is a stubborn man, and would die before he'd give in a point. Why is it you are so anxious to find Ruth Reynard? She is nothing to you. She does not know you, nor love you, as I do. Oh! Yreka, you are cruel!"

"And you are foolish to entertain a single particle of affection for me," he retorted, kindly, yet with unmistakable firmness. "As for Miss Reynard, I certainly do not know her personally; but I promised her father I'd find her and lock to her—elf, and I shall try to do it. As for loving her, or she loving me, the idea is absurd. Love is something I do not care to talk about—a kind of stock I am not at present inclined to dabble in."

"Very well. I'll not intrude my weakness upon you again. I shall always try to be worthy of your highest respect and esteem, however, and hope that you will not regard me as utterly insane. If you want to find Ruth Reynard, I can help you."

"You do not mean to tell me that you can conduct me to Miss Reynard?"

"No, but I have that which will reveal her hiding place."

"What! you have not Hiram Hatch's boots?"

"I have—or, that is, I can easily get them, as I know where they are."

"If this be true it is good news. I will await here while you go for them."

The mine-owner's daughter laughed, the least bit merrily.

"I haven't a doubt but what you would," she replied. But then, you see, I am not going for the boots."

"Ah! You are not inclined to have me find Miss Reynard?"

"No more than you are inclined to dabble in love stocks, sir. On conditions, I will produce the boots, and if there is any virtue in the claim that the star on the left boot will guide you to the secret mine, then you can find Ruth Reynard."

"On conditions, eh?"

"Exactly."

Yreka was silent a moment. It cost him no effort to guess what the conditions were.

"Did you ever see this Ruth Reynard?" he finally demanded, "when your father was guardian over her?"

"I saw her, but not frequently, because she was placed in a young ladies' seminary, and kept there, by my father's orders, very seldom being allowed to leave the premises. I never took a strong liking to her, however, nor she to me, I fancy."

By this time, they were some little distance out of Death-Rattle, and ascending the mountain-side, toward a patch of young, shining pines.

"What are these conditions of yours?" Yreka asked, pausing, and looking back over his shoulder, to gain breath and strength. "Per-aps I may be able

to take advantage of them, since you seem prepared to enter into a business contract."

The conditions are these: that, if I furnish you with the boots, and you find Ruth Reynard, you will never court or marry her, or tell her you love her, and if you marry at all, you will marry me!"

She spoke unhesitatingly, candidly.

She meant what she said, too.

She could be dealt with, so far as the boots were concerned, only on her own terms.

Yreka understood this, and knew that they might as well come to an understanding at once. Well enough satisfied that she could never be anything to him, Yreka knew that it were better that she should understand the fact at once and for good.

"Your conditions are very extraordinary and unreasonable, Miss Banks," he said, "and I can make no hesitation in saying that I cannot accept them."

"Then you shall never see Ruth Reynard!" she declared, passionately. "I will betray her into the hands of my father, and the Gambettas, first!"

"If so, I cannot help it. As far as Miss Reynard is concerned, it is not probable that, even if I meet her, I shall fall in love with her. Did I do so, however, and conclude to woo her, I should get her in spite of any person's objections or opposition. And, as for yourself, I cannot promise you that which you seem to desire. Indeed, it is my duty to frankly tell you that there is not the least prospect of my ever marrying you."

She came nearer to him, and he saw that her face was very white, her eyes fairly blazing with passion.

"Very well!" she hissed, her breath fanning his cheek—"be it so! You have pronounced my doom, but not alone! You have pronounced your own. If I cannot win you, no other woman ever shall!"

And as she finished speaking, a stiletto flashed swiftly through the air; then, and uttering a wild, unnatural cry, she hurried away into the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

RUTH.

YREKA JIM had been standing in an unguarded attitude, never once suspecting the mine-owner's daughter of being capable of the treacherous act of stabbing him, until he felt the stiletto piercing him, and saw Beulah hasten away.

He sunk upon the ground, a feeling of deathly faintness coming over him.

He did not entirely faint, however, for he had sense enough to pull the stiletto from the wound, from which the blood flowed, hot and fast.

The blow had been badly aimed.

Although intended for his heart, it had touched him at one side, the weapon striking one of his ribs, and glancing off into the flesh part under the arm. Although the wound bled freely, it was not dangerous, nor did it promise to inconvenience him much, it being the concussion of bone and steel that caused him to feel faint.

The feeling gradually passed away, and he tore open his shirt and bathed the wound with water from a rill near at hand until the flow of blood was stopped.

He then lay still a few minutes, wondering if he were too weak to walk.

"I'd like to own a treacherous woman like that for a wife—may be!" Yreka mused, his brow darkening. "She is even worse than I could have believed her. She no doubt thinks she has killed me by that cowardly blow; but I allow I ain't quite dead yet."

"I wonder if she will go and kill herself, as tragically jealous maidens sometimes do? I fancy not; it requires a good bit of nerve to take one's own life, and Miss Beulah is too sensible for that. She evidently inherits some of her father's bad spirit, and no doubt will visit vengeance on Ruth Reynard, if she can find her. Therefore, it is important I get upon my paws as soon as possible, and make a more active search for the girl than I have been doing. Beulah says she knows where the boots of Hiram Hatch are concealed. As the Gambettas are in Death-Rattle, it is morally sure the boots are in their possession. The chances now are that the girl will go and affiliate with the Gambettas, and participate in the scheme to put Ruth Reynard out of the way, and get possession of the insurance money upon her life."

He was thus communing with himself when he heard a footfall only a few yards from where he was sitting.

Peering quickly in the direction indicated, he fancied he could faintly discern the outlines of a woman's figure.

"Who comes there?" he demanded, drawing and cocking a revolver. "Speak, or I'll fire!"

"A friend!" came back the answer, in unfamiliar tones. "Are you Yreka Jim?"

"You bet your dollars and cents I am. Advance, and let's have a look at you."

The woman—or, more properly, the girl, for she was yet in her teens—came hesitatingly forward, and paused a few paces from the recumbent sport.

He then perceived that she was the same mysterious maiden who had visited the Fletcher cabin, prior to Beulah Banks's call.

For a moment she and Yreka gazed at each other without speaking, then she evidently discovered the blood upon the ground, for she took a step forward.

"You are hurt?" she said, interrogatively, her voice soft and pleasing.

"Oh! not much," Yreka responded. "I got shot a couple of times, down in Death-Rattle."

"I know; but haven't you been wounded again?"

"Oh! just a bit of a cut with this," and he held up the stiletto.

"I thought so. I saw you leaving the cabin with Lemah Banks. I followed, and when back here a

piece, I saw her fleeing toward the camp, as if Satan was after her. So I hastened on, mistrusting that something had happened. Did she stab you, sir?"

"Yes; but the wound is of no account. You are Ruth Reynard, are you not?"

"I am, sir. And from what I have learned, I take you to be the gentleman whom papa sent after me, in advance of Hiram Hatch?"

"Your supposition is quite correct. I am that person, and am known as Yreka Jim. I am very glad to meet you."

"It is equally a pleasure to me to meet you, sir, for since Mr. Hatch went away, I have not practically had a friend in all this wild country. But we must not tarry to converse here. The prospects are that it will rain hard ere long, and we must seek shelter. Can you walk?"

"I reckon I can make a 'go' of it, although I am very weak. Where do you live?"

"In a secret mine. The entrance to it is not far off. Allow me to assist you."

She helped him to his feet, and as they left the spot she kept hold of him, supportingly, to prevent his falling.

They walked along the mountain-side until they came to where a small stream of water flowed over a ledge of rock. On either side of the fall grew dense thickets of saplings, and bushes which were apparently impenetrable.

Ruth, however, parted the shrubbery, and it then became revealed that once inside the thicket a clear path was opened, which led into a large, damp, slimy cave beneath the falls.

"You don't live here, I trust?" Yreka said, as she paused.

"Oh! no!" and unswinging a little dark lantern from her belt, she turned on a full flood of brilliant light; "the mine is further on."

They went forward then, and soon entered a narrow passage hewn out of the friable rock.

For a few yards they traversed this, and then debouched into an inner cavern, larger considerably, with a high-vaulted ceiling. Here all was dry and comfortable.

The bottom of this cavern was rough and irregular, and scattered about it were large and small bowlders. There was but one clear and level spot, which was in the center of the chamber.

To this Ruth conducted the sport, and gave him a seat upon a couch of skins.

She then set fire to a bunch of fagots, and soon had an agreeable fire, the light smoke rolling up and disappearing in the crevices in the ceiling fifty feet above.

"We are safe here for the present," Ruth said, bustling about and preparing a pot of coffee, as well as roasting a savory chunk of bear-meat; "but there is no telling how long, as I put no confidence in Silas Fletcher. You overheard his conversation with his wife? Well, I've scarcely a doubt but that he will turn traitor."

"Is he the only one, aside from ourselves, who knows of the location of this place?"

"He and his wife, now that Mr. Hatch is dead, are the only ones."

"How about Hatch's left boot being a means of guiding a person here?"

Ruth laughed merrily.

"The idea is preposterous," she said, pausing to turn the meat. "It seems that when father lived here, Hatch was a scout in the mountains. Being out of luck, he tacked a golden star to his left boot for good luck. Sure enough, he blundered into this place shortly afterward, and he and my father came to an agreement, by which they were partners. Hatch, however, always held that the star was a sure guide to the mine, and would part with it for no money."

The supper ready, Yreka did full justice to it; then he and Ruth conversed for a number of hours, consulting and arranging as to the latter's future.

Yreka was inexpressibly charmed with her. She was well educated, high-minded, pretty, and possessed a frank, sunny nature.

She was of the type of women whom he could appreciate.

The hours were advancing toward morning, and Ruth had suggested the expediency of getting some sleep, when a large black cat, which had been her sole companion and which was lying near the fire, suddenly arose and darted toward the entrance to the mine.

"Danger!" Ruth said, quickly seizing a rifle. "We are going to have visitors."

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW FLETCHER SOLD OUT.

GIRARD GAMBETTA lost no opportunity to ply the miners with liquor, at the Death-Rattle Hotel, and, as a consequence, he got them in a good fighting humor, by the time it was fairly dark.

They then assembled outside of the bar-room, and Gid Grinder delivered a speech.

"Feller-citizens o' Death-Rattle," he cried; "behold! I am chock-full o' benzine, but fuller o' fight. Need I tell ye the cause? Hyr aire we, a prosper'us people, who works hard, takes our whisky straight an' minds our own bizness. Along comes a galoot w' ther gall uv an elerfant, an' paints yer 'umble s'nt gory red an' somber black. Luk at me, feller-citizens, an' behold a picter of injured innocence—a martyr ter another skunk's monkey bizness."

"Tuet ain't ther worst of it, feller-citizens. Yer know my nature. I don't feel fer meself, but fer you, ther people. It ain't me w'ot hes suffered, but you, ther people. When ye war strugglin' fer a raise o' wages, what did this Yreka Jim do? Why, he meddled w' ver bizness, an' prevented ye from gettin' that which ye orter have—he tuk ther bread an' bacon right out o' yer mouths!"

And the rough mine boss shook his fist in the air, fiercely.

The grim-faced miners made no response—their silence sufficiently expressed their ill feeling toward the sport.

Grinder went on.

"Yas, feller-citizens, ther skunk got his work in on us all, alike. Aire we goin' ter stand it?—No! No! goin' ter let one contemptible whiffet uv a man cheat us?"

"No!" "No!" "No!" came a loud chorus of answers.

"On course we ain't," Grinder roared. "We aire goin' ter hev satisfaction, we aire goin' ter hev revenge. We're goin' ter gobble up this Yreka Jim, an' send him ter Kingdom Come on ther tight rope. Hurra!"

From three-score of throats the yell of approval pealed forth, and awoke the echoes of the night.

"Yas! yer a-shoutin', we're goin' ter put ther choker on Yreka Jim's cussed gullet!" Grinder continued, "an' ther ain't no sort o' use o' monkeyin' about it, or losin' time. Ther galoot aire down thar at Si Fletcher's an' he's out!" Come! I'll lead ther way, ef I hev ter wade thru blood!" and leaping from the barrel on which he had been standing, the ruffian started for Fletcher's cabin, the crowd following close behind him.

The distance to the cabin was short, and they soon arrived before it.

Fletcher had evidently heard them coming, for he was standing in the doorway.

"Hello! thar!" Grinder saluted, as he and the gang came to a halt. "We're heer, Si Fletcher, an' I reckon mabbe ye know what we're heer fur?"

"Dunno's I do!" was the response, "less et's fer Yreka Jim!"

"Ye hit ther spike slam on the top 'not, then, Si, w' yer usual good judgment. We aire heer erter ther sport, an' we want him. So yank him out, or we'll boost you to a branch, same's we intend ter boost him."

"Ther feller ain't hyer," Fletcher announced.

"Ain't heer?" roared Grinder, with an oath. "None o' yer lyin'! Yank him out."

"He ain't heer I say!" the miner protested. "He's gone."

"Whar? whar?"

"I don't know. Last I see'd o' him, he were layin' heer, in ther middle room. A bit ago, when I went ter look fer him, he wargone. Slid out by ther back door, I reckon."

With a fierce malediction, Grinder pushed past Fletcher, into the cabin, the crowd following.

Fletcher, who was an arrant coward, trembled in his boots.

"Ef we doan't find ther sport, we'll hang Fletcher, kill Romeriqua, an' paint ther town red w' blue!" he heard Grinder roar.

This was enough for Fletcher.

Watching an opportunity, he slipped away and ran swiftly toward the Romeriqua dwelling.

He found the two Gambettas and Romeriqua standing on the doorsteps.

"Hello! what's the matter?" the latter demanded as the miner drew up, breathless and panting.

"Matter!" Fletcher echoed—"matter? W'y, the devil's to pay. Yreka Jim has escaped, an' the mob are ferocious mad. They swear they wot he cheated of their revenge an' are goin' to murder you. If you wish to save your lives, fly to a place of safety without delay."

The words caused the conspirators to look alarmed.

"Pooh! you're wrong!" Gambetta demurred. "They wouldn't dare attack us!"

"Wouldn't they? Well you can just stay here, and test the matter, if you want to. I'm going to a place of safety, an' ye can go along, if ye want, an' I'll pay me my price!"

"Where do you intend going—what do you mean?" Romeriqua demanded.

"I mean that I know where the Reynard secret mine is located, and I'm goin' there, till matters blows over. Then, I'm goin' East. So if ye want me to show ye where the mine is, an' where Ruth Reynard is, just pan out ten thousand dollars in greenbacks, right quick, an' I'll show ye."

Miguel Romeriqua and Girard Gambetta stepped one side, and held a brief consultation. When they returned, the former said:

"We don't believe you know where the mine is?"

"Ye don't? Waal, I ain't goin' ter stand here fer no palaver, you kin bet. If you fork over my price, ye can go along. Otherwise, Yreka Jim will get the gal, an' I'll be glad ov it, you can bet."

Romeriqua uttered an oath.

"Does Yreka Jim know where the mine is?" he demanded.

"Shouldn't wonder a bit ef he was there w' ther girl, now!"

Just then a wild yell was heard in the direction of Fletcher's cabin, and flames were seen bursting through the roof.

The mob had fired the miner's home, and as the flames lit up the scene, the mob were seen coming toward Romeriqua's house.

"Here they come!" Fletcher cried. "I'm goin' to slide out before it is too late."

"Wait! wait!" Romeriqua exclaimed, dashing into his house. "Wait till I get my money!"

He soon returned, with a bundle of bank notes in one hand, and a tin safe in the other. The notes he handed to Fletcher.

"There's your price. Now, lead away, without parley!"

Fletcher gave a grunt of satisfaction as he stuffed the notes into his pocket, and led off.

He was rich, now—and happy.

To be sure he had left his wife behind, but he had

given her the word to "scoot," and presumed she also had escaped.

"If not—if the mob had killed her—it mattered little to this dishonest husband, in whose eyes ten thousand dollars were of more value than a whole harem of wives.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CAVE TRAGEDY.

YREKA JIM also arose at Ruth's alarm, for intuitively he decided that the "visitors," as Ruth termed them, were the Gambettas and Miguel Romeriqua.

"Have you another rifle, Miss Reynard?" he asked.

"Yes—yonder are several repeating-rifles, already loaded. Wait, I will get you one."

She did so, and then closed the slide of the lantern.

All then was inky darkness.

"Was the cat's flight sure indication that some one was entering the cave?" Yreka asked in an undertone.

"Yes. Toby is as good as an electric signal. He never leaves my little camp here except his sharp ears detect a suspicious sound. If everything is all right he will come back directly."

"You suspect who is coming?"

"Yes. I've no doubt but what Fletcher has sold out to Bayard Banks, as he threatened to do, and they are now coming here to secure me and take possession of the mine."

"What will you do—surrender?"

Ruth laughed oddly.

"Well, no, not if I can help it. Bayard Banks is a villain, and if he attacks me I'll shoot him without any compunctions. If he were to capture me I believe he would kill me, so as to get possession of the insurance upon my life."

"You are, undoubtedly right, in that surmise. At any rate, they shall not gain possession of you while I can fire a shot," Yreka said, decidedly.

They listened, intently. The deepest silence reigned for several minutes.

"Maybe it's a false alarm," Yreka said, finally. "The cat probably heard the movement of some animal, in the passage or outside."

"I'm not sure about that. Something tells me that there are enemies coming," Ruth replied.

"Ah! there—did you see that?"

It was a twinkle of light, over in the direction of the entrance to the passage, such as a lighted match might have produced.

It lasted but an instant, however, and then darkness reigned again.

"They're coming," Ruth said, impressively. "That light was in the passage. It won't do for us to stay here. We must get to a point where we shall have the protection of the bowlders."

"Have you any valuables, here?"

"None. During what time I have been here I have secured all the gold that could be got at, without using powder, and, at night, transported it to a place of safety. Now let us move. Follow close in my footsteps, and look out you don't fall. You take the lantern, and I will carry the rifles."

They cautiously threaded their way through the labyrinth of bowlders, until they reached a high point on the side of the cavern opposite the passage entrance.

Here they had the advantage of a breastwork of rocks, behind which they could crouch and see through the crevices without being seen.

"We can hold them at bay, here, I guess," Ruth said. "We have got about sixty shots, all told, and that ought to keep off the enemy for awhile."

"You are right. I reckon there's not many of them. Romeriqua wouldn't be apt to bring the mob with him."

"Certainly not. You remain here now, and being familiar with the cavern, I'll do a little scouting to see how strong a force we shall have to face," and so saying, she set off through the inky darkness with the stealthiness of a cat.

Not without a deal of anxiety Yreka Jim awaited her return, firmly grasping his rifle, ready for an emergency.

Slowly the minutes dragged by—on leaden wings, it seemed to Yreka. Silence and darkness most impenetrable, reigned in the vicinity of the entrance to the mine. Yreka grew nervous and fidgety, and finally, was on the point of going in search of Ruth, when she suddenly loomed up before him.

"Ah! back, are you?" he exclaimed, joyfully.

"I was going in search of you. Did you discover the enemy?"

"No. I made a thorough search of this and the outer cavern and am satisfied we are the only occupants. If the enemy came here at all, they have departed."

"This does not seem reasonable!"

"I know it does not, and I was loth to believe it, until I convinced myself by a thorough search."

"But, might not they have been skulking around in one part of the cavern, while you were in another?"

"It is barely possible."

"What shall we do, then?"

"I know of no better plan than to remain where we are, until morning. By that time, it is likely there will be some new developments, if there are to be any, at all."

But the developments came sooner than expected—so suddenly, indeed, as to be a startling surprise.

Yreka and Ruth were seated near each other, conversing in an undertone, when, all of a sudden, a flood of brilliant light was turned upon them, from opposite directions, which for the moment so dazzled their eyes that they could not see.

"Move an inch, at the peril of your lives!" the

voice of Girard Gambetta cried, sternly. "You are covered by four six-shooters, and your only chance for life is to surrender, unconditionally!"

Having no doubts but what they were "covered," neither Yreka or Ruth made an attempt to use a weapon.

As their eyes became accustomed to the light, they were able to understand the situation.

The little gallery where they were stationed, ran down two ways, into the main cavern.

Both outlets were now blocked.

In the left one stood Romeriqua and Morrell Gambetta. The first named held the revolvers and the latter a lantern.

The left outlet contained Girard Gambetta and Silas Fletcher, the Chicagoan holding the weapons, and the miner the lantern.

"Oh! we've got you!" Romeriqua cried. "We have got the bulge on you, this time, and no mistake. Throw up your hands instant, or we'll riddle you!"

There was nothing else to do, and so Yreka and Ruth obeyed.

"You've got the bulge now, but it may not last long!" Yreka warned.

No reply was made, but setting their lanterns upon a rock, young Gambetta and Fletcher advanced, and being provided with lariats, proceeded to bind the prisoner's hands and feet.

When this operation was completed, the elder Gambetta and Romeriqua put up their weapons.

"Carry the prisoners down to the level," the latter ordered.

And it was done.

When they reached Ruth's camp, the prisoners were bound against big bowlders, in a standing position, and a fire was kindled, which soon lit up the cavern, brilliantly.

The four villains then withdrew, out of hearing distance of the prisoners, and held a consultation, which lasted several minutes.

When they returned to the fire, Girard Gambetta confronted the prisoners, with folded arms and impressive mien.

"Yreka Jim, and Ruth Reynard," he said, in a deep, sonorous tone, "I have been commissioned to make a serious announcement to you, concerning your doom. When we came to this secret mine, confident of capturing you, it was intended by us to spare your lives, but hold you in captivity, so long as we worked the mine. Upon more mature deliberation, however, we have come to the conclusion that it will be dangerous, and foolish to deal with you so lightly. The chances are, that, despite our watchfulness, you might escape. Therefore, considering what we have at stake, we've made up our minds to do the thing up brown, and make matters sure, by killing you. It may seem hard usage, but your doom is sealed, and you might as well make the best of it, and improvise the few minutes you have to live, in prayer—that is, if you believe in it."

"The four of us will now play a game of seven-up to decide who is to be your executioner. The last man out, will act in that capacity, by shooting each of you twice through the heart! If you survive, after that, you shall have your liberty," and with a harsh laugh the inhuman wretch turned away, to join the other three, who were seated about a square-topped bowlder.

Yreka Jim made no reply to Gambetta's speech, but turned to Ruth, who was very pale.

"Take courage!" he said, in a low tone. "Have no fear that we'll be murdered."

"Why?" she asked, quickly.

"Sh! nothing; only I just saw something to convince me that help is close at hand."

"Thank God!" she breathed fervently.

The men had begun the game, and the two prisoners watched them with strange fascination.

At length, the elder Gambetta dropped out of the game, Satan seeming to be with him in luck.

Next, Silas Fletcher dropped out, and finally the game ended, with Morrell Gambetta the winner.

Bayard Banks arose with a pallid countenance, and mechanically picked up a rifle.

"Count three!" he said, hoarsely, addressing the elder Gambetta, at the same time raising and cocking the weapon.

"One!" Gambetta counted—

"Two!"

"Three!"

Bang!

A flame burst from the rifle, and the bullet sped on its deadly errand.

But it did not harm Yreka Jim.

The instant Banks fired, a woman, with a shrill scream, rushed in upon the scene, and between the weapon and Yreka Jim.

It was Beulah Banks, and the bullet intended for Yreka, pierced her breast, and she fell prostrate, with a moan.

Even as quickly as she had fallen, her father threw up his arms and fell before her, his brain pierced by a bullet.

At the same instant there was a wild, awful yell, and a gigantic figure leaped from the darkness.

It was the bullwhacker, Mambrinus Maccaw!

And as he came, flash after flash, and report after report, emanated from the pair of revolvers in his grasp.

And every shot told.

First, Girard Gambetta, then his son, and then Silas Fletcher, received a bullet in some vital part, and tottered and fell, no more to rise in this life.

And although the scene was terrible, sickening and awful, their untimely deaths was but a just retribution for the four miscreants.

"Great hop-an-go-skip uv old St. Vitus!" the giant roared—"hyer I am, ther pestiferous salivatin' he-up-an'-haw, frum Hydrofoby Gulch.

"Mambrinus Maccaw,
From East Saginaw.
A dispenser o' justice,
Regardless o' law!"

"An' Yreka Jim, ye durned mealy-mouthed monstrosity, ef it hedn't a' bin fer me, yer'd Lin leader'n a corpse two year buried!"

"You are no doubt right, Maccaw!" the sport replied, "and you have our warmest gratitude for this timely rescue. Are they all dead?"

"Dead as Dutch cheese on a strike. Ye l'arnt me how ter shut straight, an' I jst socked them bullets where they'd do ther most good fer the country!"

But little more remains to relate.

Yreka and Ruth were released, and Maccaw was praised and thanked, until he begged of them to "give him a rest." The article—praise—didn't agree with him.

The bodies were then laid away, where, in the solitude of the silent cave, they were likely to remain until the resurrection day.

A few days later saw Yreka and Ruth far from Death-Rattle, and Maccaw and his gigantic equine accompanied them. As soon as they arrived at a railway point Ruth bade her friends adieu and started for the East.

There was a promise exacted and given that within a twelvemonth Yreka should also journey eastward in quest of a bride, in case he found none, in the mean time, whom he liked better than Ruth.

And after her departure Yreka Jim and Maccaw plunged back into the inner recesses of the wild West.

THE END.

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